



A PRISONER OF THE SEA

CHAUNCEY C HOTCHKISS

AP 2p
20

A PRISONER OF THE SEA



A Prisoner of the Sea

BY

CHAUNCEY C. HOTCHKISS

AUTHOR OF

"Betsy Ross," "For a Maiden Brave,"
"A Colonial Free Lance"

Illustrated by
BERT KNIGHT

TORONTO
MCLEOD & ALLEN
PUBLISHERS

Copyright, 1908
THE JOHN MCBRIDE CO.
Published October

PS
1999
H797p
1908

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE

I. IN THE DEPTHS.....	1
II. ON THE ALAMEDA.....	10
III. THE SIESTA.....	23
IV. A SURPRISE.....	45
V. A FLAW IN THE WIND.....	56
VI. THE PRIVATE SECRETARY.....	64
VII. A BAD START.....	74
VIII. SENOR BASCO'S WARD.....	88
IX. SOMETHING HAPPENS.....	106
X. THE CRISIS.....	116

SECTION TWO

XI. THE CHASE.....	131
XII. A FRIEND IN NEED.....	150
XIII. THE DEATH OF DELANO.....	167
XIV. A TRAGEDY.....	178
XV. THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS.....	190
XVI. THE TURN OF THE TABLES.....	209
XVII. ON DECK.....	224
XVIII. THE ATTACK.....	234
XIX. CONSEQUENCES.....	249

2136307

ILLUSTRATIONS

VIOLETTE MONTAGNA	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
"HER FINGERS RIPPLED OVER THE KEYS".....	96
"MISS MONTAGNA, GET BELOW, INSTANTLY!"....	147
"PUT UP YOUR HANDS!".....	191
"SHE TURNED HER BEAUTIFUL EYES TO ME".....	251

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

CHAPTER I

IN THE DEPTHS

"WHAT do you want?" I demanded of the stranger who had entered the room and stood still, glancing about him.

"*Señor*—the office—you have no use for it."

"Well?"

"I am commissioned by the proprietor to say that he has." The conversation was in Spanish. "Besides," continued the visitor, "the rent—"

"Has been paid," I interrupted, nettled at the man's tone.

"So far—yes, *señor*; but, as you are ruined, he has some doubts—doubts for the future, *señor*, and has commissioned me—"

"To do his dirty work," I interposed. "Are you his agent?"

"I have the honor, *señor*."

"Well, sir, there's the door behind you! Go out of

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

it, and tell your master that when the rent becomes due he may apply for it."

"But, *señor*, you being without means, I—we have nothing but your word, which is—"

"*Caramba!* Get out of that door or I'll throw you from the window, you insolent puppy!" I exclaimed, leaning forward as if to jump from my chair.

The fellow disappeared in a hurry, but not without giving me a vindictive look with his snaky black eyes. And thus was I brought face to face with my altered conditions.

They seemed black enough in the fall of the year 1899 when I sat in my office in the city of Havana. I say "office"—it had been my office, but there was now no more business to transact, and it was barren enough on the day of which I write.

To speak colloquially, I had been "cleaned out," and the only furniture remaining in the room was the chair in which I was sitting and a broken mirror on the wall.

I was not in exalted spirits as I tipped back my chair and, with a cigar in my mouth, looked outward over the beautiful bay and inward at my present status. But my spirit was not broken. I had too much blind faith in my "star" and too little experience in man's ferocity toward his brother to be thoroughly disheartened.

IN THE DEPTHS

The end had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that already I had begun to fear I had been a victim of downright dishonesty. My partner, a Cuban, had deserted me under rather suspicious circumstances, leaving me in the lurch. The law? What was law to an alien in Cuba at that time? And what lawyer of probity would take my case with no proofs at hand and with no retainer?

In the end, what was I? A waif in a strange land, with a large capital of pride which prevented me from going home and proclaiming myself a failure, and a small capital of—let me see again.

I pulled my money from my pocket; it was all the known assets I possessed in the world. There were ninety dollars and some loose coins—enough for two or three weeks' existence at my usual rate of living, and the idea of extending it by rigid economy was too repugnant to think of.

I jammed the money back into my pocket, angry at myself as I thought of the paltry sum and of the insult my poverty had already invited.

Then I arose and looked at myself in the cracked mirror. No assets? I had youth and broad shoulders and proportionate strength, together with a face which in all modesty I will say was not repellent.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

I gave my mustache a vicious twist, and at that moment a knock came on the door.

"Come in!" I shouted.

The door opened slowly, as though the visitor was in doubt. A large head clad in a sailor's cap was thrust in, followed by a big body.

As the man saw me his face brightened and he pulled up his cap.

"It's Mr. John Raymond?"

"Yes."

"Mate o' the Victoria, three years gone?"

"I was," I said.

"Praise be! An' faith, sir, don't ye remember me? I was bo's'n aboard, an' the last man what—"

"You are Dave Turk," I said, at once remembering him, for he was not one to be forgotten.

"Ye are right, sir," he returned, with a smile that spoiled his fine features, for the tobacco-stained fangs he uncovered came to one like a shock. "I've struck holdin' bottom at last," he continued, drawing up his immense chest in a long breath of relief. "Mr. Raymond, I'm in sore travail an' goin' on the rocks, if so be ye don't give me a tow off."

"What's the trouble, Turk? What are you doing here?"

"I'm a deserter, sir, from a hell afloat. The bark Sappho, sir, from Caracas to Liverpool. We touched

IN THE DEPTHS

here, but—I'll be open about it—ye know me, sir; I ran. It was either that or a trip overboard. The crew'll be in for open mutiny afore she reaches twenty-five, an' I'm no mutiny man, sir.

"If I stood by the quarter-deck I'd be knifed or run over the side some middle-watch; if I stood by the crew I'd like to be in quod for months. I'm not short in duty, sir, as ye well know, an' am quick to take sides; but in the Sappho both sides was wrong, an' I was like to get it comin' or goin'. I thought it better to clear from the mess by runnin'."

I understood his position and guessed his wants.

"Has the Sappho sailed?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm safe, sir," he said. "She sailed three days ago, an' I ashore without a shot in the locker. I went to the American consul an' asked for a lift home to Maine, sir, but not bein' a castaway he wouldn't help me.

"He gave me the names of some Americans here, sir, an' I saw yours, an' thought ye might be my old mate—which ye are, thank Heaven! Ye may say I might ship in a steamer, but I could never sign for one o' those iron-pots, sir, while a tops'l is left to be reefed. If I can't make a fair voyage in a fair wind-blown bottom, sir, I'll lay my bones in the county-house at home, if I can get there."

I looked at the fellow narrowly, but I had not a

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

doubt of the truth of his statement. He was a type of the blue-water sailor then fast disappearing and probably now gone in this age of rush and steam and steel.

He was a man of over fifty, standing at least six feet high, magnificently framed, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his big bones, and with nothing of decrepitude about him. His fingers, indeed, were curled inward as though in readiness to hook on to anything, but his legs and arms flexed easily, and there was no hint of the bound muscles and rheumatism with which the aged seaman is usually cursed.

But it was his head that chiefly held the eye. His iron-gray hair was thick and hung nearly to his shoulders, and his face, burned by the sun and wind to a clear bronze, was unwrinkled.

He seemed to belong to the eighteenth century, for his features were like the best of those which have come down to us as "Colonial"—strong, clean, and kindly, with shaven jaws and dark, arched brows over light, quickly moving eyes. He only needed a ribbon to gather his hair, and a proper dress, to have posed for the pulpit or the statesman's rostrum.

In his station or out of it, Dave Turk was a handsome man of the old-fashioned type until he opened his mouth. Then he either shocked the beholder with his teeth, or shocked the ear with his language.

IN THE DEPTHS

But I happened to know that my father had trusted him where he would not trust those in a higher walk in life; and I had no reason to doubt him. Doubt! The word seems an insult to his memory.

"What I want," he said, hitching up the belt of his dungarees and glancing with but half-concealed astonishment at the barrenness of the room, "is a lift out o' this or enough to get a kid o' somethin' fillin' an' a roof until I can find a ship with a Christian crew. Ye are rich, sir. Somethin' in the way of a loan, sir. It will find its way back if the Lord lets me live."

I laughed, then grew serious.

"Turk," said I, "barring desertion and our different training, I am in much the same state as yourself. You are no fool; look about you."

I waved my hand at the room. His eyes opened wide, and he took a step forward.

"Robbed, sir?"

"I don't know, but if so the thief has left the track that a ship leaves on the sea. I'm cleaned out save for a few dollars."

"My Lord, Mr. Raymond! Is it so? Can ye put me on the wake o' the devil? I'll have it out o' him! I loved yer father, sir. He trusted me an' treated me like a man, an' I'm fain to pay for some of it through sarvice to his son."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

As he spoke his thick fingers formed into a fist. I was touched by his thoughtless generosity, but I only laughed again.

"I'm obliged to you," I said; "but I know too little to take any action. However, Turk, that is neither here nor there. I will pull from my hole easier than you from yours, no doubt, and if this will help, you shall have it."

I took five dollars from my capital and held it out to him, but he hesitated, though he looked wistfully at the bill.

"I don't know, sir. I hate to take yer money. I wouldn't ha' come with a tale o' distress had I thought ye were so pressed."

"Take it," I said. "Do you think I could eat, knowing an old shipmate was hungry through my meanness? You'll pay me before I need it."

"Heaven knows I hope so," he said, knuckling his broad forehead as he took the bill. "I don't know what's to be done. I would to the Lord old times were back, and that I might be for'd an' ye aft once more on a tight bark like the Victoria. Will ye not ship again, sir?"

"I'm off the sea, Turk—off the sea. I have not even a paper to show I have been on it. Let it go, man. You will fetch a ship in a few days and all will be well with you."

IN THE DEPTHS

"I hope so—I hope so." He knuckled his forehead again and backed to the door. "I won't bother yer honor any longer, but if there be anything I can do Dave Turk is at your orders, sir."

"Where can you be found?" I asked, little dreaming of the importance of the question.

"Along the shipping, sir. I make no head or tail o' the darn names in this here place. I have no berth anywhere, but am along what ye may call the wharves. Good day, sir, an' God bless ye."

He knuckled again and went out while I sat down to finish my cigar, not knowing that I had cast my bread upon the waters, from which it was soon destined to return.

CHAPTER II

ON THE ALAMEDA

THERE is a subtile something in the air of the tropics which is apart from the heat and is unknown to the dweller in the northern climates. It is soothing to the nerves and tends to make men careless of the future, and the spell of it was upon me as I re-seated myself at the window and looked over the broad bay lying before me. Havana harbor is a fair sight, swimming as it does in a bath of liquid color, but the blue expanse was then scarred by a small black spot where the wreck of the *Maine* lifted its ragged plates above the quiet water. There was little of detail to catch the eye at that distance, and my gaze wandered aimlessly until my attention was arrested by a schooner, evidently a recent arrival, for I had not seen her the day before.

She lay well inshore, and as I looked at her markings, the delicate rake and towering height of her bright-wood masts, I knew her to be no trader. Her sail-covers lay like a depth of snow along her booms and there was a glitter of polished brass which flung

ON THE ALAMEDA

off the sun with the quick flash of a rifle as she moved to the barely perceptible swell. She showed no colors at either masthead or taffrail, which fact had caused me to think and look twice at her. I was neither curious nor impressed. Probably some nabob's yacht, I thought, out of commission for the time; such a vessel as I would like to pass a few easy months aboard, going from port to port with good companions, eating of the seductive lotus flower and dreaming in *dolce far niente* until inanition palled.

I found myself falling into the spirit of it and pulled myself up sharply. Inanition! What was I to do with inanition? I, who was a practical man and, shame to me, a failure! And, being a business man, now without business, it became me to look to the future instead of dreaming in the present or mourning over the past. "What would dad say to this?" I ejaculated, running my eye over the barren room; "and what can I do?" I knitted my brows as Turk's suggestion came back to me. "Go to sea?" I had only been acting first mate, placed in the position through stress of circumstance, but even after that to go before the mast, especially with my knowledge of the life, was out of the question. On the other hand I had no certificate for a position aft even should opportunity offer.

What remained? A life ashore, of course; a busi-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

ness life. Let me but see an opening, even in a subordinate position, and I would take care of the rest. And yet—not in Havana! The gorge of my pride lifted at the thought of lowering myself in a locality where I had been known as a man of capital and where but few need know of my misfortune or gross carelessness. I would look for a position beyond the city, and—it came to me like a flash—I need not use my own name; indeed, I would not, but under an assumed one support myself, lie low, and try to untangle the knot of my affairs. I might, in time, recover some of my property if I could prove crookedness.

I here own myself weak enough to wish for the presence of an intimate, both for advice and for moral support, but I demanded neither as a necessity, youth being generally self-sufficient. But both advice and support were out of reach, for the only man I would have deliberately taken in my confidence was my old college-mate, Stet Delavan, and he had been out of my ken for years. He had been my *alter ego* in the old fair days, and whether, like myself, he had sunk under bad fortune or was lifted on the crest of success, I had no means of knowing; I only knew that were he with me the chances of ferreting out a swindle would be greater—my pleasure greater—my position— I brought my feet down with a crash.

“Damn such dreaming! Never in God’s world will

ON THE ALAMEDA

I accomplish anything by sitting here!" I said aloud. I flung my wasted cigar from the window, and putting on my coat and panama, went out.

The city was stretching itself for its final awakening for the day, Havana being wide awake only after the sun goes down. I dined generously, and my cigar bore none of the flavor of restricted means. I knew nothing of economy, and I did not attempt to economize.

The band was playing on the Prado when I came out, and the electric lights sparkled over the white costumes of the men and the darker glories of the women. The sea breeze blew like a blessing, and Havana was alive.

But I turned from the Prado, though usually I sat out the concerts. I do not know what moved me—not depression, surely; perhaps it was the finger of Fate, which, it now appears, might have been laid on me with the coming of the old boatswain of the *Victoria*. I walked on until I reached the café region of the main avenue of Calle Obispo, and there dropped into a chair at one of the tables under a crimson awning. I called for coffee and picked up the newspaper lying before me. It was *La Lucha*, otherwise The Firebrand or The Combative One; it is difficult to translate its meaning.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Before I attempted to peruse its meager news columns an advertisement caught my eye.

It was to the effect that an assistant manager was wanted on a sugar estate near Matanzas. The party need not possess experience other than that of general business; the recompense would be liberal. The applicant might address the manager, but a call in person would be preferable.

Before I laid down the paper I had determined to go to Matanzas the next day and apply for the position. The title of assistant manager had some dignity, and the salary would be large.

Here was a stone I must not neglect to turn. I tore out the advertisement and put it in my pocket, then looked about me, as easy in mind as though all had been settled.

For the most part the tables were deserted, the Prado still being the point of pleasure so early in the evening; later the cafés would be filled with careless, gossiping crowds and the Calle Obispo would spread itself. But there was sitting near me one couple that attracted my eye and ear, and that because their conversation, though not loud, was of a character that showed something like disagreement between them, the younger of the two violently gesticulating as he intermingled some round Spanish

ON THE ALAMEDA

oaths and insults with his words, which were apparently partially directed against some absent party.

Their dress showed that neither were regular residents of Havana; for your true Havanese of the male persuasion, if he pretends to gentility, wears nothing but white. The clothing of the younger man—he of the violent language—was nondescript, and as his back was toward me I saw nothing of his features. The other was a man of some fifty years and without doubt was connected with the sea, for there was brine in his face, too pale for health despite its bronze, in his clear eye, crisp hair, in the bullion-banded cap that lay on the table, and stronger than all else, in the blue uniform with its gold braided sleeve. In his hand he held a stout walking stick.

An officer attached to some liner, I determined, and I took an immense liking for him. There was kindness in his expression, and a strength in his self-control under the volley of the other's words, that commanded my respect. Perhaps, too, I was influenced by the fact that he was a sailor—and not of the Latin race.

I left them still disputing and walked to the Alameda, dismissing the two with the thought that if any man spoke to me in the way the young fellow was speaking to his elder I would knock him down.

The plaza or esplanade of the Alameda was a noble

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

promenade, but it suited my mood to be alone that night, and I chose a bench at the deserted western end. I sat and smoked and thought pleasantly enough for perhaps an hour, watching the stars like diamonds strewn on purple velvet. The ocean was calm; the small rollers sobbed over the coral rocks, and the deep mystery of the sea lay like a spell before me. It was as though night was putting a finger to her lips to invoke silence.

Perhaps I had dozed, coming to myself when I heard voices, though it might have been but one voice, and it was shrill with anger. Two men were standing close to the sea-wall's edge; no one else was about and it was evident that my presence had been unnoticed. I at once recognized them as the couple I had left in the café on the Calle Obispo, and the officer was leaning heavily on his stick as though needing its support.

Hardly had I gathered the last detail when I saw the younger man spring like a cat on the elder and throw him.

Unknown to me, the instant of the assault was the turning-point in my life; for had I sat still, content to watch the outcome of a quarrel which certainly was none of my business, this story would remain untold for lack of sufficient subject matter.

But I did not sit still. I had a feeling that the man

ON THE ALAMEDA

in uniform was my own countryman, and had little notion of seeing him, after being taken at a disadvantage, succumb to one of a race which I had no reason to love.

Acting upon impulse only, I ran to where the two were now struggling on the pavement. As I came up the young fellow sprang to his feet, his beady black eyes ablaze. Even in the half light I now knew him for the agent who had insulted me in my own office.

"What do you want?" he demanded in Spanish. "This is no business of yours!"

"I am making it mine," I returned easily. "It was a cowardly trick to throw a sick man."

He looked at me, breathing hard and half-closing his eyes. Then he seemed to place me.

"*Aha! Vusted esta el puerco Americano! Caramba! Vusted—*"

He got no further.

"American pig, am I?" I cried, and struck him full on the chest.

He spun around, falling on his hands and knees ten feet away; but he was up in a second, and I saw him draw a knife as he came for me.

One need not be in deadly fear of such a weapon in the hand of a small man if one looks for it, and knowing his breed, I expected no less.

As he came up I backed a pace, then, grasping his

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

uplifted arm with my left hand, I drove my right fist between his eyes and let him go. He staggered back half a dozen paces and went down, but without suddenness; it was as though he had tripped. Before he could recover I had my foot on his knife-arm and my revolver was in his face.

"Drop it!" I said, bringing my weight on his arm. His fingers relaxed their hold, and I picked up the weapon. "Now get up and away from here. If you raise a hand to me I'll shoot you like a dog. If you hang around I'll hand you over."

I spoke in English, for in my excitement my Spanish got away from me. I think he understood. Anyway, the fight was out of him as he came to his feet.

"I'll know you again," he said venomously.

"And I'll know you by your eyes for a month to come, though I doubt if your mother recognizes you by to-morrow morning," I returned, pocketing my revolver, but still holding the knife.

"If you will give it to me I will then go," he said, holding out his hand and indicating his weapon.

"You'll go without it," I returned, advancing on him. "*Vamose!*" I shouted, lifting my voice for the first time. He turned and ran a rod or two, then seeing I was not following, walked on until he was out of sight.

ON THE ALAMEDA

The officer had gotten to his feet by this.

I stooped for his stick. "Did he hurt you?" I asked.

"No," he answered soberly. "But I am obliged to you, sir," he continued in perfect English, though there was a Spanish accent perceptible that surprised me. "You have done me a service I would gladly have done for myself save for circumstances, and the additional fact that I am but just recovered from a long illness. I think I will sit down. I am shaken. He took me with the suddenness of a squall."

The allusion confirmed my idea of him. I gave him my arm to the bench I had left.

"A seaman, sir?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And an American? I thought as much. It was one reason—"

"I am an English subject, but so long in or about this place that I now feel more Spanish than English. May I ask whom I have to thank?"

His manner and words convinced me that he was a man of some education, but I did not feel obliged to give him my confidence just then."

"I am an American," I answered. "I have been in Havana about a year on a business venture."

"Ah! I am Captain Edward Delano."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

It was an undisguised bid for my own name, and it could not be ignored.

"I am John Ransome, of New York," I returned, hardly knowing why I was acting on my recent determination to withhold my surname. Ransome is my middle name, taken from my mother's family."

"I am glad to know whom I am under obligations to," returned the officer. "The matter was not a personal one in a true sense. The fellow—almost a stranger, although I know his brother—was trying to persuade me to do something against my orders. When he found appeal useless he lost his head; it's the way with these irresponsible hot-bloods. I should hope to see more of you, Mr. Ransome, but I am off to-morrow. I am only waiting for my mate; he is due by steamer to-night."

"I, too, am expecting to leave Havana," I answered. "I go to Matanzas in the morning." He looked up quickly, but spoke in his even voice as he said:

"To Matanzas? Mr. Ransome, will you allow me? I am captain of the yacht *Siesta* and take her to Matanzas to-morrow to her owner. Unless you are greatly hurried, I can make your trip pleasanter than by railroad. I should be happy to be your host on the trip. We will be quite alone aft. I hope for your better acquaintance."

ON THE ALAMEDA

The words do not express the delicate grace with which this invitation was given. It was delightful. And why not, I thought, as I considered my small capital. It would be pleasanter than a hot ride on a Cuban railway and a saving as well. I answered heartily:

"I am obliged to you, Captain Delano. In fact, I am more than willing, since I have not set foot on a sailing vessel for upwards of five years. We never touched at a Cuban port."

"Are you a sailor, sir?"

"I have been acting first mate on a bark," I answered.

He held out his hand and shook mine vigorously. "I might have guessed your calling by your readiness to act, Mr. Ransome. I am glad to know we are not to part as abruptly as we met. The *Siesta* is a schooner—lying near the wreck of the unfortunate Maine."

"Ah! I saw her to-day," I said, recalling the beautiful vessel I had remarked.

"If you are not familiar with yachts, sir," he returned, "I will show you something worth seeing. Let me thank you again. I must be going, as I stay with a friend to-night. You will find me on the *Marino* to-morrow at four o'clock. You will not fail?" He arose from the bench as he spoke.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

“I will not fail,” I said.

When I returned to my hotel I examined the knife I had captured. It was a folding-dirk of considerable age, with a beautifully engraved blade made in Spain. On the handle was a worn silver plate, upon which I made out the name

JOSE FOSSE.

There was a deep notch on the handle, and my knowledge of an old Spanish custom told me what that meant; but I did not know whether to credit the tragedy it recorded to some former owner or to its late possessor.

CHAPTER III

THE SIESTA

I MET Captain Delano promptly the following day, and my suit-case was passed into the yacht's tender by as vicious looking a sailor as I had ever set eyes upon.

There were two, in fact, and I should not have cared to meet either in the dark. However, sailors are much like singed cats—apt to be better than they look; and the yacht itself absorbed my attention as we drew near her.

From my office windows I had caught nothing of her details, but her exterior beauties came out strong as we approached her. I had seen and handled yachts in my day, but nothing of her size and grace.

Save for a broad gilt stripe, she was as black as polished ebony, the sun-lit water dancing in her sides as though in a black mirror, while the light, glancing upward from her bright copper bottom like a shimmer of gold, left her floating in an aureole of yellow radiance.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

We ran under her immense length of jib-boom, and the carved and gilded tiger's head which graced her stem seemed to snarl a welcome to me. Her shrouds being stayed on chain-plates, her high free-board was without a break save for the round brass-bound ports that pierced her. From the graceful overhang of her stern to the uppermost push of her cutwater I judged her to be more than one hundred feet in length.

"What do you think of her?" asked the captain as we rounded her bow.

"She's the finest piece of marine architecture of her size and kind that I have ever seen," I answered enthusiastically.

"Yes? Wait until you have seen all of her," he returned calmly. He did not appear to be enthusiastic himself; perhaps familiarity had blunted him.

We swept to the starboard gangway and there I had an earnest of what was to follow. The side steps were of solid mahogany carved in intricate design and inlaid with some bright wood; the hand-rail terminated in the bronze head of a tiger where the enamelled leather rope pierced the polished deck stanchion. Surely, thought I, her owner must have been hard put to spend money. I might live a month or two on the cost of those steps.

We were met at the gangway by a small, ordinary

THE SIESTA

looking man, and by his uniform I guessed he was an officer. I then knew little of the relations between captain, officers, and men in the yachting service, but I soon discovered that the line of *caste* was far more sharply drawn than in the merchant marine. The officer, whose rank I was soon to learn, was most subservient to Delano; he acted as though he were afraid of him.

The deck I stood on was as white as snow and showed the sparkle of salt in the sun, for there were no awnings stretched. Save for a low cabin-house of panelled mahogany with wide doors leading to the companion steps and a cock-pit around which were cushioned seats, together with masts, hatches, the longboat and forward gear, the deck was unbroken from stem to stern. The wheel was a marvel of beauty and the binnacle glittered like gold. The boat davits were of polished brass, and brass and mahogany were everywhere in evidence. The order and cleanliness of all was immaculate; every rope was new and every spare line and loose end was flemished in true man-of-war fashion. The standing rigging was of steel cable; the masts towered into the blue above, and the main boom was a giant of a stick. There was small danger of a lack of work on the *Siesta*; it would keep two or three hands busy to maintain the polish on her metal-work alone. Altogether, the vessel,

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

from the deck, was one to make a sailor's heart leap for joy and showed not only discipline but a lavish expenditure of money.

I took these things in almost at a glance, for my eye had been trained to such matters. The captain turned to the officer and inquired brusquely:

"Has Mr. Connelly come aboard?"

"No, *señor*."

"Don't *señor* me, sir. Address me in English when I speak in English, Mr. Diaz."

"Yes, sair. A telegram has arrif for you. Eet is in your cabin."

"Very good. When the sea-breeze makes, haul short the anchor and report to me. Come, Mr. Ransome, we will get below and out of the sun."

I followed him down the broad companionway and into the main cabin. It was a large apartment, taking in the full width of the schooner, but was dismantled so far as cushions, hangings and ornaments were concerned. In one corner was an open fireplace, tiled and guarded by a fine brass screen; in another stood a grand piano muffled in heavy cloth.

A large, richly carved, swivel-topped center-table was bolted to the deck; a massive chandelier hung from the cabin ceiling directly over it, and the luxuries of the luxurious were visible in the easy-chairs and lounges, in the paintings screwed to the bulk-

THE SIESTA

heads, in the cut glass and silver that gleamed from the French plate lockers, in the deep Turkish rug that covered the deck.

The center of the gold decorative *motif* on the ceiling was a large tell-tale compass, and richness in everything was the prevailing note.

The only hanging I noticed was a heavy screen of silk depending from an artistic grill, and this separated the cabin from the passage forward. From what I could gather, I was in a floating palace.

The captain opened a door leading aft from this saloon and ushered me into his own cabin. While not so ornate as the room we had just left, it was luxuriously comfortable, and, like the other, extended the width of the vessel just forward of the overhang of the stern, that space being used as a deep locker.

I noticed these details from the arm-chair to which my host motioned me while he went to the table, picking up and tearing open the telegram lying thereon. He read it scowling, then with a muttered imprecation in Spanish thrust it into his pocket, and pushed an electric button in the bulkhead. In less than thirty seconds the call was answered by a handsome negro in uniform.

"Two cocktails, steward," said Delano, without lifting his eyes.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Yes, sir." And the man disappeared.

"You don't appear to favor the language of Cuba aboard the *Siesta*," I remarked, as the captain opened a humidor and brought out a jar of cigars which he offered me.

"No," he returned, handing me a match-box. "Every man on board must speak English; the owner demands it. Though a Cuban himself he has a dash of your American blood in him, and he is mighty proud of it since the war. If you chance to meet him address him in English with a touch of your Yankee slang. It will flatter him."

The captain placed his foot on the head of a bronze tortoise on the floor; its back flew up and disclosed a cuspidor. He flicked the burnt match into it and sat down near me, his face wearing the ghost of a smile,—the first relaxation of his fine features I had seen.

"May I ask the owner's name?"

"Juan, or John, Basco. He takes his father's name and ignores the Spanish custom of tacking on his mother's."

Juan Basco, of Matanzas! I knew the name perfectly well, as did all commercial Havana, or all Cuba, for that matter. He was the Cuban agent of the great New York house of Martinez & Co., and was reputed to be enormously wealthy, having steered a

THE SIESTA

safe course between the rocks during the Spanish War.

I knew that his partner had lately died, and had a vague notion of there having been some recent trouble; but the idea was misty. I did know, however, that Basco & Co.'s name had appeared in some of my own transactions, they being trustees for some estate in which I had invested, but I had never seen the man himself. Undoubtedly my partner knew him; he had attended to all such matters.

"You have some curiosity about the vessel, perhaps," said Delano. "Well, we are but half manned. We cleared from Savannah, Georgia, where we had been fitting. In the middle of the work I went down with typhoid, and was only just on my legs when word came to get the yacht to Havana.

"I had no more than cast anchor yesterday morning when I was ordered to proceed to Matanzas, so you see I have had no time to fill up my crew. My mate failed me, too. I expect him to come aboard at Matanzas, however. That telegram is from him.

"Moreover, we are only half provisioned for a voyage at present, and my second officer, whom you saw on deck, is a man I cannot trust. You must know that the captain of a yacht has his troubles, and mine are not lessened by the fact that the owner expects

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

everything to be in readiness for a voyage at any moment."

He lifted his cocktail, which had been brought in, bowed to me and swallowed it at a gulp; then, as I slowly drank mine, he settled back into his chair and eyed me—not offensively, but as one looks at a person he is studying. He was less pale than in the dim light of the night before, his voice was stronger, and I noticed he had not used his stick, though he carried it with him. When in health I knew his face would be red and hearty and his light-blue eyes more prominent. I saw the British type of the man, and liked him none the less. I would have been willing to hear more of the trouble of the previous evening and of his relations with my landlord's impudent agent, but as he did not allude to the subject I was unwilling to obtrude it.

"What is your burden?" I asked.

"One hundred and thirty tons. The list of the *Siesta's* virtues, in short, is that she is one hundred and twenty feet over all, draws fifteen feet, carries a crew of fifteen men forward, and I have seen her log, under all her canvas, fourteen knots with the wind fresh abeam."

"And your destination?" I asked, more to keep up the conversation than from curiosity.

"To the Mediterranean, I believe," he answered

THE SIESTA

rather wearily. Then he leaned over and pushed the button in the wall. The negro responded at once.

"Arrange Mr. Connelly's room for Mr. Ransome," he said to the servant. "Perhaps, sir, you would like to see your quarters."

I took the hint, somewhat too broadly given, and prepared to follow the black.

"I will meet you on deck when you are at leisure," said the captain as I went out.

We walked through the saloon and along the curtained passage, passing a number of closed doors. The main-mast trunk came down through the center of this corridor, and around it was built a case, evidently an arms-rack, but its plate-glass front showed that it was empty.

When we came to the steps of a booby-hatch leading from the deck above, my guide opened the door of a room on the port side and ushered me in.

"The bath-room, sir, is the first door to starboard, forward," he said, and then left me.

I found the mate's room a veritable sea-parlor. Though not so large as the captain's cabin, and lacking the extreme elegance of that apartment, it was the finest service room I had ever seen afloat. Two large, round ports with double frames, one of chipped and one of clear glass, lighted the interior. An enormous swinging lamp of heavy bronze hung over a

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

flat, rosewood desk. A large mirror with consoles was let into the forward bulkhead, and a brass bed, fixed to the floor, was fitted with side guards that its occupant might not be thrown out in a heavy sea. The floor itself was partly covered by a thick Turkish rug, and lace curtains hung over the ports. The whole was like fine quarters in a first-class hotel, its only sea flavor being the tell-tale compass in the ceiling, the bed-guards, ports, and economy of space.

"Connelly's in luck," thought I. "I wouldn't in the least mind making a few months' trip to the Mediterranean in such a craft as this. She would be able to stand anything that might come along in the way of weather, and we would not have to drive ahead under all possible circumstances."

I sat down and dreamed for a time. Everything was quiet, but the heat below was intense. I bathed my head and face, and as I brushed my hair I saw through the round port the flag on Morro Castle lift to the first whiff of the incoming sea breeze. At once I went on deck by way of the booby-steps near my door.

There was a bustle forward, and the clank of the winch-pawl told me the anchor was being hove short. The mainsail was already set, its slackened sheet letting the immense boom swing outward, while two

THE SIESTA

hands were hoisting away the foresail by the aid of a gipsy-winch which did the labor of a dozen men.

Seeing Captain Delano standing aft, I made my way to him. He was by the rail, looking forward with a deep scowl on his fine face. He motioned me to a seat in the cock-pit, but did not relax his features nor his interest in what was going on forward.

I could not help but notice the quiet in which the schooner was got under way. There was no chanting by the hands, no "yo, heave," nor cheery call. The sliding of the sail-hoops and the tinkle of the pawls from the anchor and the gipsy winches were all the sounds I heard save the faint, musical ripple of the reefing points as they pattered on the swinging mainsail. The gangway steps had been unshipped and the quarterboat hauled to its davits. Everything was orderly and there appeared to be oceans of room about the decks. Presently a cry came floating along the deck: "Anchor's away, sir."

"Both jibs, Mr. Diaz," shouted the captain. "A hand aft to the wheel here. Stiffen the forepeak, you at the winch. There. That will do."

All this was strange to me. How different, thought I, from the ways of a square-rigger under similar circumstances. This was tame. I missed the hearty chant; I missed the hands running aloft, the avalanche of falling canvas, the lifting of the yards, the

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

manning of braces, the hoarse shouts to the tops from the deck. There was a lack of the English and American ways of doing things—a want of that rush and spirit of willingness that marks the northern sailor. It was not that the handling of the schooner was unfamiliar; I understood it well enough; but it was strange, this quiet and slackness, after the bustle on the old *Victoria*.

This may be the ways of pleasure in contrast to the ways of business, I thought, but if I commanded this deck I would see the hands moving at a livelier gait or know the reason for the contrary. And still there was no great fault to find; all had been done easily enough.

Presently I felt, rather than saw, that something was wrong. By this time we should have been slowly gliding from the anchorage. I looked around to see the shore shift. It appeared to be creeping around in a circle, and the next moment we gradually careened as though forced over by a heavy blast of wind; and there we hung.

I heard Captain Delano utter an oath as he ran forward, his voice lifting like the roar of a hurricane.

“Let go fore and main sheets. Let go jib-halyards and man the down-haul.”

Then he brought up against the second officer, who seemed in a flurry.

THE SIESTA

"You monkey-faced son of a codfish!" he shouted, grasping the mate by the collar and dragging him aft. "What do you mean by reporting the anchor away when it hasn't broken ground? Call yourself a sailor, you swab! If I had time I'd set you ashore. Get out of here, and don't dare open your mouth to give another order or I'll pitch you over the side."

The orders bawled out were quickly obeyed. As the great sails went over to leeward and the jibs came down, the schooner righted. I jumped to the side and looked over. The chain cable was almost abeam, and the links had scored the paint from the beautiful side of the schooner in long streaks; there must have been six or eight fathoms resting on the bottom when the anchor was reported as broken from the ground.

I did not envy the second mate. The captain went forward after administering a parting kick to the offending officer, and the matter was soon righted so far as the delay was concerned. The anchor was catted and fished, and we proceeded on our way, gliding along smoothly enough with the increasing breeze.

The second mate, unable to bear the eyes of his superior, had gone below, and the captain stood by the helmsman as we wafted by the wreck of the

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Maine and across the harbor, giving a low order once in a while, his temper still showing on his face.

We ran on the port tack until well under the land, then went about and stood out to sea through the narrow passage which makes Havana one of the most easily defended ports in the world.

There was a crowd of figures edging the sea-wall as we swung by, but not one of them had ever seen a fairer sight than that made by the *Siesta* with the flush of sunset on her white sails, the light flinging from her polished points like spears of gold, and her glistening body shearing smoothly through the swells that rolled in from the Gulf.

We stood straight out, close-hauled, the wind increasing in force until it reached the usual full strength of the evening sea breeze, the yacht lifting and bowing slowly over the long, low seas. It was not until we had made a fair offing and the sun was nearing the horizon that the vessel was put about to the east.

The air, now on the port beam, set the deck aslant under its pressure on the immense sails, and the water boiled alongside as though we were on a steamer. The yacht still lacked much of her possible cloth, but it did not take half an eye to see that she was a remarkably fast boat.

When the new course was laid and the sails

THE SIESTA

trimmed to it, and with little bulge to the flat canvas, the captain left his station near the helm and joined me in the cockpit, though he did not seat himself. His face had lost its look of anger, but that he was still irritated was shown when he said:

"What do you think of our experience, Mr. Ransome? Was there ever such a lubber standing for an officer as my second mate?"

"Where did you get him?" I asked.

"The owner sent him up from Matanzas on trial, and a trial he has been. I know nothing about him save that he has served on a steamer in some capacity and that he might do to keep a drawing-room in order. He's no sailor; that's certain. I find, too, that though he can take the sun's altitude, he is unable to work out the sights. What would you do with such a man?"

"I'm not in the way of offering you advice, sir," I said, "but if I commanded I'd make short work of him by giving him his choice of either going before the mast or going ashore. Were we at sea I'd break him at once. I am sorry for the mate who don't know the difference between pulling up a snag with his cable and breaking away his anchor. Such a man is dangerous."

"I quite agree with you," said the captain. Then, looking up at his sails, he continued: "We should

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

make Matanzas in a few hours, but I hardly think I will work up the harbor before daylight. You will not mind?"

"Not in the least," I returned. "This is a breath of life I have not known for years. I would be loath to lose it before absolutely necessary."

He looked at me for a moment in his former manner of studying me, then he said:

"It is rare that a man of your stamp—one who has served as first officer—should leave the sea for the land. It is strange. Possibly the sea has cheated you, and you push your fortune better ashore."

He was so wide of the mark that I laughed easily, albeit there was a touch of bitterness in it to my own ear.

"I should have been better off had I remained afloat," I returned. "I find more sharks in the city—and quite as hungry—as ever I knew on deep water."

"Aye, aye," said he; "and they bite—they bite. Eh, Mr. Raymond?"

I had been looking to windward to where a steamer was nosing toward Havana, a plume of violet smoke trailing behind her like an unrolling ribbon; but at the mention of my right name I was startled. It had come like the crack of a pistol, and I

THE SIESTA

slewed myself around and looked at the man who now stood gazing at me.

"Sir," I said, speaking rapidly, "when I accepted the invitation to be your guest I did not mean to part with any of my rights. Was this a mistake, Captain Delano?"

I arose and faced him, but he did not move.

"Mr. Raymond," he returned quietly, though seriously, "I am usually more than willing to respect a man's incognito, especially if it is the wish of one to whom I am under obligations; but I called you by your proper name that I might lift the veil lying between us. I would not have done so were there a third party present or had I not wished to serve you. My motive cannot be construed into an offense unless you insist upon so regarding it."

"How did you come by my name?" I asked.

"You forget I was ashore all day to-day, and you did not know that I met again and had a talk with the man who assaulted me last night."

"He is my landlord's agent," I said.

"Yes," returned Delano, smiling broadly, "but I hardly think your landlord would know him to-day. You left your mark on him."

"May I ask, sir, what he told you?"

"Without doubt. He told me you were an American pig who had lost his last dollar in the world."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

I was about to answer warmly, for my gorge rose at the knowledge that my private affairs had been discussed, and the part I most wished to conceal laid bare to the man before whom I had presumably posed as at least well-to-do; but at that moment four bells were struck forward and the steward appeared at the head of the broad companionway and announced that supper was ready. The captain dismissed the man with a wave of his hand, and continued before I had a chance to interpose a single sentence in explanation.

"You asked me what I had been told," he said, "and I repeated the words as given; but, Mr. Raymond, they do not lessen my respect and regard for you. Moreover, I deliberately opened the subject, knowing that your pride would forbid your doing it; and did so that I might possibly serve you.

"Now, sir, I have two favors to ask; first, that you will go below and eat alone, as I cannot leave the deck at present; the second I will ask when you come up. I trust, sir, that you will meet me in the spirit I endeavor to show. Perhaps I have been too short. There is my hand, sir."

Both his words and his manner disarmed me. There was an openness about him that he had not hitherto shown, and he smiled genially. I realized that the words which had offended me had been ut-

THE SIESTA

tered at my own request, and if what I had heard had been repeated with bluntness and an apparent want of tact, it might be due more to the man's open nature than to any desire to offend me. Why should he wish to antagonize me, a comparative stranger and his guest? I grasped his outstretched hand with an apology for my own heat; then I went below.

But for the steward, who stationed himself behind my chair, I ate in solitary grandeur. The meal was not an elaborate one, but it was very much better than the sea table I had been used to in the merchant marine, and the bottle of sound claret did much to restore my spirits. I do not mean to say that the outlook was brighter, but for the time I was careless of the future.

When I finished my meal the steward placed a jar of cigars before me. I took one, lighted it and returned to the deck. Captain Delano was stumping the weather side, his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

It was now night, but a night made luminous by the multitude of stars aloft; the wind held steady with the push of the trades, and the sea was all a-ripple. As I appeared Delano came over to me.

"Now for the greater favor," he began abruptly. "I hope you had a satisfactory supper?"

"Excellent, thank you."

"Good! It is never worse, and sometimes better,

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

aboard this schooner. Mr. Raymond, perhaps you have noticed that we are but half organized, owing to my hurry orders. My first mate has not come aboard, my second is in disgrace, and I have but a scrub crew. Therefore, I am practically alone, and I am going to ask you to take the deck while I eat. You see my faith in you! Will you oblige me?"

I was rather startled; not from a feeling of uncertainty as to my own ability, but that he should ask such a service of one of whose experience he knew nothing. But I did not hesitate.

"If you feel that I might be equal to any occasion I will gladly oblige you," I said.

"Good! But I don't think you'll be heavily taxed. Hold her course as she is. I will not be gone long. You will take your orders from Mr. Ransome," said he, addressing the man at the wheel.

The fellow simply nodded as he shot a glance at me, his black eyes sparkling in the light that flowed from the binnacle. Then the captain went below and I was left alone.

I walked the weather deck smoking and drinking in the beauty of the night. It was lovely. Even the loom of the land was gone and we were in the swift, eastern run of the Gulf Stream, sailing but a few seconds south of and exactly parallel with the Tropic of Cancer. Could anything be more perfect, I won-

THE SIESTA

dered? I conceived I would have nothing to do of consequence, but the sense of responsibility came on me with the power of an old and delightful habit long since broken.

For the nonce I was in charge of the loveliest marine fabric I had ever set foot upon, and I thought that if this could only be a commissioned right I would be content, for a time at least.

There was not wind enough to cause the rigging to hum, but there was a long, low, and steady breathing as the fresh air drove downward from the close hauled sails and gushed over the deck, which, though slightly inclined, was as steady as though the yacht was careened on a bank. All this was present happiness. Of the morrow I did not care to think.

I paced forward to the waist, complacent and self-satisfied. As I drew abreast of the booby-hatch a figure rose out of it and came up to me.

Through the gloom I recognized the second mate.

"The capitane is below?" he asked.

"Yes," I returned shortly.

"You haf heard the way he treat me?"

His voice was low, but intense.

"I could hardly help it," I returned indifferently.

"*Caramba! No quiero permitirme!*" Then he switched into English: "Eet is one big outrage! I do my duty! I will haf justice! Who are you, sair?"

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"None of your business," I returned, nettled at his tone. "It is enough for you to know that I have charge of the deck at present."

"*You!*" he exclaimed, starting back. "You tell *me!* I am the officere here, *señor*. I haf the deck. I will relief you."

"My friend," I returned, gripping my cigar with my teeth and tapping his narrow chest with my forefinger, "you may fight out your rights with Captain Delano when he comes up, but I beg to remind you that I have been placed in charge of this deck, and if you issue an order I will have the disagreeable duty of knocking you down. Do I make myself understood?"

"*Mio Dios!*" he exclaimed, throwing up both hands in Spanish fashion. "*You!* You haf my position—my office? You are a lan'lubbare! You come through the cabeen-window! I will not stan'—"

"No more of that," I interrupted. "You heard me. Take my hint and give me no insults."

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE

I SWUNG on my heel and left him muttering, but he made no move to follow me aft. I was conscious I had made an enemy, but it did not matter; friends or enemies, I would be away from all on the schooner on the morrow—"worse luck," thought I; "I feel like a boy who has had a jewel placed on his finger for the feel of it. Let me get all the pleasure that the imagination of the moment can bring."

I walked to the binnacle. The schooner was now heading east by north, and the luff of her mainsail was all atremble.

"Keep her off a point," I said to the helmsman. "You are off your course."

The fellow shifted his wheel sullenly.

"The wind hauled," he growled.

"That's for me to find out," I returned sharply. "Keep her due east."

I walked forward again. The second mate had gone. A scrub crew, indeed, I said to myself, and unless the captain shifts his ship's company he'll

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

have a little knuckle-dusting to do before he brings them into proper shape. As I pondered thus Captain Delano came up. I gave him a salute and laughingly turned over my command.

"All right," said he, after conning the sails. "Any news?"

"A slight experience with your second mate," I replied, and then told him of the encounter. He looked at me sharply.

"You know your rights," he said as I ended. "But the fellow is of no consequence. To-morrow he will have his choice between clearing out or going forward; that will test his mettle. And now, Ransome—I'll stick to that name lest I forget myself—let's walk a bit."

We walked in silence for a few minutes, when he suddenly stopped by the cabin-house and swung about, facing me.

"I am going to be blunt," he began. "I don't know how to be anything else—and it is for your good. Come—tell me something of yourself."

I laughed.

"The yarn is short enough," I said. "Unfortunately you know the gist of my story already."

"There's nothing in that," he rejoined quickly. "Many a man has failed in one venture and recovered in another. I mean, who are you? Who were you?"

A SURPRISE

And how did the clean-out happen? Don't be offended. I am deeply interested."

"My yarn is short and prosaic enough," I returned, determined to unburden myself. "I am a New Yorker. My father was a sea captain, commanding his own ship, the *Victoria*."

"The *Victoria*! Ah!"

"Yes. He made a fortune in the asphaltum lakes of Trinidad. I went through school as most boys do, and then to college. While there, and in my third year, my father took me out to assist him. He kept me at sea six years.

"He was a martinet even to me, and ground me under him until I understood the rules and practice of navigation and seamanship from computing the variations of azimuths to sending down the royal-masts. At the end of that time I stood on his quarter-deck as acting first mate. Really, so far as knowledge goes—I say it modestly—I was fitted to command.

"A mint of money had been gathered in the meantime. My father made his last voyage and I, as I supposed, mine. So sure was I of the latter fact, Captain Delano, that I made the mistake of my life. I neglected to apply for papers, and haven't a rag to show that I know a lanyard from a lee-scupper.

"Otherwise, under my present stress I might ship.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

My father sold his vessel, and then, somehow—I don't think he knew himself—he got into the clutches of the Lake Trust and was squeezed of his wealth. I suppose he lost something over a quarter of a million dollars. The blow killed him, with scarce a doubt, and I came in for the still considerable remnant of his fortune—some forty thousand dollars. I have neither mother, brother nor sister, and until a few days ago knew nothing of the meaning of a lack of money.

“After the war, I conceived that much might be done in real estate in Cuba. I came here, and was led into operating in tobacco lands by my late partner, a Cuban—my partner still, I presume, though he left me suddenly.”

“What was his name?” interrupted the captain.

“Rafael Ravena.”

“Ah! Go on.”

“Well, that is about all that will interest you. I have been cleaned out—just how, I am unable to say; and don't dare voice my suspicions, as I have no present proof.

“Of course, my landlord knew of my trouble, and thought I might be insulted with impunity, so he sent that agent of his, who managed to do it once in the office, and once again on the Alameda. That's all. May I ask why he jumped on you?”

A SURPRISE

Captain Delano puffed his cigar thoughtfully a moment. "I'll tell you this much," he said. "Young Fosse—Fosse is his name—is the brother of my employer's private secretary. Just why he assaulted me I will not say, not being at liberty to. He apologized handsomely to me, and is giving his time to nursing his eye in a dark room. Now, just what do you propose doing?"

"Well," I said, "I have confessed to being in desperate circumstances; you may get my lead from this."

I pulled out the advertisement I had torn from the paper and handed it to him. He stepped to the binnacle and read it by the soft light. When he came back he was smiling broadly.

"If you were familiar with *La Lucha* you would have seen that inserted on the average of once a month," he said, returning the slip.

"Do you know the party?"

"Yes. He's a dog—a thief—a miserable half-breed who promises and never performs. Since the advertisement moved you to go to him and thus you are here, I am glad you thought of applying; otherwise, you had better have remained in Havana. You are the kind of man he would drive insane unless you saw his game and killed him first. This thing is a bait for fish with a small capital. He gets their

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

money and they, as usual, the experience. You've had one dose of that, eh? I'm not advising you; I'm informing you."

My heart went down like lead. So secure had I felt—without warrant, I confess—that it seemed as if the deck had been cut from beneath me. "What can I do now?" I thought, and perhaps I uttered the words aloud, for Delano caught me up.

"Ah! Do you ask that of me seriously?"

"It was a momentary weakness if I did," I returned desperately. "You know the situation."

"Good!" he replied. "Read this."

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a paper, thrusting it into my hand. I went to the cockpit. By the light that shot from the great lamp in the cabin I saw it was a telegram—probably the one he had found when he went to his room.

I drew out the enclosure and read:

Under the circumstances, will not reship on *Siesta*. This is final.

CONNELLY.

It was dated from Savannah, Georgia.

For the moment I was mystified as to Delano's motive in giving me this to read, but by the time I had held it open twenty seconds I had little doubt of his intention. The yellow paper trembled in my

A SURPRISE

hand. I replaced it in the envelope and rejoined him.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" I returned.

"Will you take the position? I offer it authoritatively, and it is not a sudden move on my part. Don't hurry with your answer."

He spoke easily, though I was conscious he was looking fixedly at me.

"It is a handsome token of confidence in one you know little about," I said. "And you forget; I have no papers."

"The last, I am willing to waive," he returned briskly. "I am something of a reader of character, and you carry a plain log. Is there no one in Cuba who knows you were the mate of the *Victoria*?"

"The old boatswain of the *Victoria* was in my office yesterday," I answered, and in a few minutes I told him of my interview with Turk. Delano appeared interested. He took me by the arm and we walked together.

"See here, Ransome, you are a navigator, a man of education, and a gentleman. What does this mean to me? What would it mean to you to accept my offer—you who are close ashore with the rocks under you? Here is a berth open to you, and the pay will be liberal—as much as a merchant captain gets

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

under harder work and more worry. There is no cargo to think of; no drilling hell-bent through any and everything. I tell you, sir, it is a chance I would not offer to everyone. A first and a second officer I must have. You have shown your temper and I would like you with me. There you have it. Sleep over it and let me know in the morning."

"But the owner! Mr. Basco may—"

Delano laughed.

"He don't know the boom from the bobstay, and if he should interfere with my manning this schooner I would throw up my commission—and he knows it. However, he never interferes."

"I'll think it over," I said.

"Do," he returned heartily, "and oblige me by again taking charge of the deck while I dress down Diaz."

I am not going into the pros and cons of my cogitations. I will only say that I volunteered to divide the watch with my host that night. I walked until two o'clock, as agreed, and nothing disturbed me. In the interim I thought hard. Early the next morning I went on deck and found we were well up the harbor of Matanzas. The wind had fallen and we were barely moving. I walked up to where the captain stood and held out my hand.

"I will accept," I said.

A SURPRISE

"Good!" he replied. "When we have breakfasted you had better get back to Havana by train. You will have personal matters to attend to and must get your uniforms; I will give you my tailor's name. We may lie here ten days or two weeks. I will telegraph you when I want you. Do you need money?"

"I think not," I said.

"We will talk business after the anchor watch is set," he continued. "By the by, if you run across that man you were talking about send him along. He can get his outfit from the slop-chest aboard."

Four hours later I was on my way to Havana. I had been closeted with Delano for some time, and when I left him I had signed as first officer of the *Siesta* for her trip, be the length of it what it might. Delano had insisted on the latter point.

I was ashore with my first month's pay in my pocket, and it was a princely sum for a first mate—more than the stipend of a merchant skipper; for I was richer by one hundred dollars, though I am ashamed to say it seemed but a small amount of money after what I had been in the habit of carrying.

In the late transaction there were several unusual circumstances and one query.. It was unusual that my lack of papers was waived, that the length of the trip was without date, and that the itinerary of the

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

voyage was involved in mystery. The query in my mind was: What had caused the first mate to decline to reship on the *Siesta*?

But, on the whole, I was satisfied. I was chief mate of a beautiful vessel, and the prospects were for easy work and no worry. I could save every cent of my salary and get my wits together to act for my business interests after the voyage was over.

After the voyage was over! Great Heaven! If I had but known! Still, I would not have had it changed.

I was five days in Havana, during which time I gave up my barren office, even scratching my name from the door with my own hands, and with far more relish than I dreamed would be possible when I saw it put on. Then I sought for Turk with the pleasant idea of doing him a favor, for I never dreamed of his doing one for me.

For two days I was unsuccessful, and had come to the conclusion he had found a ship, when I ran across him on the Marino, sitting on the sea-wall pensively expectorating into the water. He was low in spirits, for him, but I never knew a man to jump from the depths of despair to the heights of happiness with so little demonstration. I gave him some money and a note to Captain Delano, and told him to report at once.

A SURPRISE

On the morning of my sixth day in Havana, when I was looking forward to enjoying myself, I received this telegram:

Come on the next train without fail.

DELANO.

CHAPTER V

A FLAW IN THE WIND

SOMETHING beyond the words of the message told me that the demand was imperative, and I was on my way to Matanzas in less than two hours. I arrived there in the heat of the day, to find that the *Siesta* had already been warped from her anchorage and was made fast to a pier-head.

Her jib-boom had been rigged in, its stays hanging loose, but her bowsprit forked over the quarter of a brig that lay across her bows. A spar-boom had been stayed from the mainmast and its tackle and fall hung idly over the main hatch, amidships.

There was no sign of life about the boat except for one fellow forward under a bit of flame-colored awning and another lolling among the boxes, barrels and bales on the pier itself. The *Siesta* was taking in stores, but that no work was then in progress was not surprising, for all Cuba goes to sleep at noon.

I gained the deck unquestioned. Descending the companionway, I knocked at the captain's door and heard him call an irritable "Come in."

Captain Delano sat in his shirt sleeves at the table, a pile of papers before him, and opposite sat a small, elegantly dressed man with glasses to his large, brown eyes. His smooth-shaven face bore an impatient frown, and the lines that ran from his nostrils to the corners of his thin-lipped mouth were deep, like lines of worry.

It was not a strong face, though it plainly belonged to a man of refinement. An abundance of curly brown hair fell carelessly over his forehead. I noticed that he brushed it back from his moist brow as I came in, lifting a small, clean, shapely hand, the fingers bearing several rings, from which there flashed a sparkle of diamonds.

The captain looked up with a scowl, but when he recognized me his face cleared a bit.

"Oh, it is you!" he said, as I formally reported my arrival. "You are prompt, Mr. Ransome." He turned to the other. "*Señor*—Mr. Basco, this is my first mate."

I bowed. The man moved his rather handsome head in a slight nod of acknowledgment, but he did not offer either to rise or shake hands. In fact, after a searching glance at me, a glance that did not alter his expression, though it took me in from head to heels, he turned his attention to the captain.

Inwardly I resented this treatment, but I was not

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

in a position to protest. Undoubtedly Delano recognized the lack of common courtesy, for he said at once:

"We are busily engaged at present, as you see, sir, and are pressed for time. Take your siesta while you may, Mr. Ransome. I will call for you later."

"Very strange," I thought, as I went out from them, "but I have discovered one thing: *Señor* Basco is a cad for all his wealth—a cold-hearted cad; and a cad is a coward."

I went to my own cabin. Finding my baggage in my room, I unpacked and then took a bath in as completely furnished a bath-room as I had ever found ashore. I had but just completed dressing when the captain sent for me.

I went to his room and found the owner gone and the table cleared of its papers; but the door of a safe I had not hitherto seen, and which was concealed in the overhang of the stern, was open, and I saw that the compartment was well filled with books and bundled documents. It was a small thing to notice, but it was well that I did, as, when the safe was closed, the panelling of the bulkhead gave no hint of its existence. As I entered, Delano threw himself wearily into a chair.

"Your recall was sudden, Mr. Ransome," he said.

"I judge it was necessary. I was ready."

"It was necessary," he returned abruptly, "for we sail to-night. I am going ashore and will be gone until after dark. Certain articles in the way of boxes and baggage will be sent down to you with a note from me. Tally them as they arrive. I wish them placed in the cabin at once—at once. Do not attempt to disturb them nor allow any one to go abaft the mainmast, either on deck or below, save yourself—no one to go aft."

"I understand, sir."

"Good! Are you armed?"

"Always, in this land, sir."

"Good again! Get the remaining stores, now on deck and on the pier, into the hold. This move is sudden, even to me, and—well, another matter; there will be no second mate at present, Mr. Ransome. You and I will stand watch and watch.

"Now let me tell you one thing more. No one knows the date or hour of our sailing, and I wish to impress on you that it is not advisable that any one should know it. Do not touch a line nor indicate by any movement that the schooner is about to leave Matanzas."

He looked mighty hard at me as he spoke, but whatever my thoughts were (and they were many and peculiar at these unusual instructions), I did not

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

let them appear on my face. I simply indicated that I understood his wishes.

"There is one thing more," he said, as if it were an afterthought. "I do not think Mr. Basco has taken a liking to you."

I felt my face turn red.

"Evidently not," I returned. "Moreover, I do not believe I shall be particularly popular aboard this vessel."

At that he brought his fist down on the table with a bang that sounded as if the heavy wood had split. "I don't care a damn!" he almost shouted. "I have engaged you, and that is enough for him or anyone else! Did you ever know an officer of force and spirit to be popular with his crew? All you have to do is to obey my orders; I will attend to the rest. But you must not be prejudiced against Basco. He's a strange man—a devilish strange man ! But don't allow his attitude to trouble you, sir."

"I shall not lose sleep over it," I replied. "Is there anything else, Captain?"

"Nothing; except to say that if you see matters aboard which do not touch you or your duty, and which you do not understand, you had best curb your curiosity. Your line, as first officer, is clear; you will have nothing to fear if you follow it."

He stood up—an act I took as a dismissal, and I turned to go.

“By the way, did Turk report?” I asked.

“Yes. I rated him on his old lay, as bo’swain. I like him. Does he know anything of navigation?”

“Not he,” I answered, “but it is all he lacks of complete seamanship.”

“Well, he is broad fisted, and looks able and willing to use them on the scum forward. There goes six bells, sir! Better turn to.” I put my hand on the knob of the door.

“Oh!” said Delano. “My *ci-devant* second mate has elected to go forward instead of going ashore. What do you think of that for pride? I’ll be plain with you. Mr. Basco wished me to reinstate him as a special favor to his private secretary, but I laid my commission before him and told him he might take his choice between running the schooner himself or letting me do it.. He made no further demur. I trust we will have no trouble with Diaz, for his own sake.”

“I trust not,” I returned, and so left him.

As I went on deck and forward Turk came up to me with a delighted face, but he stopped short of offering me his hand and brought up with a salute. I ordered him to start the crew and get the stores below with all possible despatch, and presently his whistle sounded merrily, and the work went forward,

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

I did not see that Diaz suffered anything at the hands of those over whom he had once been stationed. I presumed he had given them satisfactory reasons for electing to remain aboard and forward, thus sinking his pride in a manner utterly incomprehensible to me; I mean incomprehensible then, for later his motive became plain enough. He had nothing to say to me, being even careful not to catch my eye; but I was aware he could have no friendly feeling toward me, and I wished he had chosen to go ashore, for one discontented hand may corrupt an entire ship's company,—and that he was both disgruntled and vengeful, I had no manner of doubt.

Between the heat, my unusual activity and the stupidity displayed at times by the hands, my temper became none of the sweetest. It was nearly sunset and the seabreeze was beginning to mitigate the temperature when the work was finished, the decks cleared up and the men sent to supper. I was satisfied. I had obeyed Delano's orders and had given the crew to understand that my will was law. I hardly think they had put in such a half day's work since they came aboard. The manner of laboring in latitude 20° is different from that of 40° , but they used the latter method for the nonce, and earned their rest. Doubtless they cursed me roundly, and perhaps I had inherited some of my father's spirit of driving.

I had finished my meal and gone on deck when the first load of baggage arrived. It consisted of trunks—something like a dozen or fifteen—enough to hold the wardrobe of a court, and with them came a note from Delano telling me to establish my guard at once.

I placed Turk at the mainmast and gave him the orders. He looked surprised, but knuckled his forehead without remark.

The loading was completed without incident, and then came more matter—not trunks, this time, but boxes about a foot square, covered with canvas and strapped with metal, and bags, canvas-covered so that only the leather handles appeared. Nothing was particularly heavy, save the square boxes, one of which I lifted.

I judged from its weight that it contained coin, for ready cash is necessary on a pleasure voyage. Now I saw why the crew had been kept forward and the stuff handled by truckmen. I signed a receipt for so many articles, and the drays drove away together.

By then the beautiful cabin looked like a storehouse, and I wondered where all the stuff would be distributed; why were not the trunks placed in their owner's rooms, and the cash in the captain's cabin? Had I thought deeply I might have found other things at which to wonder.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

I WAS sitting in the cock-pit after lighting a fresh cigar when a stranger appeared by the cabin and started to descend the companionway. As it was dark on deck he had not noticed me, until I jumped for him and barred his way as he came into the shaft of light from below.

"Who are you?" I demanded, seeing at once that he was no sailor.

"Ah, *señor!*" he returned with a smile I thought I knew, "I am *Señor* Gabriel Fosse, private secretary to *Señor* Basco."

He hardly had need to tell me; I would have known it anywhere despite the fact that he was better looking, taller and better dressed than his brother; better every way, probably, I thought, but a Fosse, nevertheless. As he had not been excepted, I considered him included in my orders.

"How did you come aboard, sir?" I asked, ready to give Turk a wiggling for letting him pass.

"Over the rail, *señor.*" He spoke English as perfectly as I did.

"Had you come by the gangway, as you should have done, Mr. Fosse, you would have been stopped. I am sorry, but you will have to go back."

"But, sir," said he, dropping the *señor* and his suavity together. "I wish to go down stairs."

I shook my head.

"You cannot go below nor even remain here," I replied firmly. "These are my orders, and they will be obeyed."

"But, sir, you fail to understand. I am the secretary, the—"

"I perfectly understand and am as unchanged in my determination."

"Just for one little moment, please. I only desire to see that my—my box—my bag, that is, has a mark by which I may identify it. That is all."

I had no desire to argue with him.

"Turk," I shouted. The boatswain came ambling aft. "Show this gentleman off the schooner unless he chooses to wait forward of the hatch. I am sorry, sir," I said, turning to the man, "but my orders are strict. I expect the captain at any moment; perhaps he will permit you; I will not."

"Come, sir," said Turk as Fosse hesitated.

"I must consider this as an affront," said the secretary loftily, "but I am not yet ready to demand satisfaction."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Do you sail with us?" I asked. He bowed slightly and smiled obtrusively, displaying a fine set of teeth. "Then you will have ample opportunity to set me right if I have been wrong. Good evening, *señor*."

I tipped my cap, but he drew himself up and marched off, Turk following.

"Where did he go?" I asked the boatswain somewhat later.

"Forward, sir, an' fell a-palaverin' with the pill I bunks with."

"Who?"

"Diaz, they calls him, sir."

This was not remarkable, Delano having told me that the two were friends, but I saw that a concession had been made to the deposed second mate. Instead of living in the forecastle he shared a room with the boatswain, who does not stand a watch but "sleeps in," as do the cook and the carpenter, who never respond to any cry save that of "all hands!" I was glad Turk had the man under his eye.

It was after nine o'clock when Captain Delano returned. He was hurried and looked troubled.

"Mr. Ransome, you will haul the schooner astern so that the jib-boom, when rigged, may clear that brig forward. Do it quietly. We are not to sail to-night, after all. That done, report."

He looked about the cabin as he spoke, nodded as

if in approval and went to his room. It was a small matter to ease the moorings, haul astern and refasten the vessel. In less than half an hour the job was completed and I so reported.

"Very good," said Delano, looking up from the writing he was at. "You will lock the cabin doors to-night, Mr. Ransome, and the door of the passage forward of your room. See that the watch is set and then you are at liberty."

"Mr. Fosse is, or was, aboard, sir."

"He was!" said Delano, swinging around in his chair. "What doing? Did you allow him to go into the cabin?"

"No, sir." Then I told him what had occurred.

"You did right. Let him go to the deuce. I dislike his breed." He turned back to his work, and, bidding him good night, I went out.

Descending through the booby hatch to my own cabin, I threw off my outer clothing without lighting my lamp on account of the heat, and sat down in a large wicker chair between the ports and the door to catch the draught.

Cogitating over the mystery of our sailing and Captain Delano's strange independence, I suppose I must have half dozed, though I continued smoking. I knew the fire of my cigar was close to my mustache, and I was about to throw the stump through

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the port, when I became certain that some one was in the passage, though I was not conscious of hearing a sound.

I stepped to the door, expecting to see Captain Delano, but instead of him I caught sight of a man coming slowly down the booby hatch steps and noticed that the door above was open. I stepped back softly and stood behind my own door, for I knew then as well as I knew later that, whoever it might be, the man had no right in that quarter of the vessel at that hour.

There was a night lantern over the empty arms-rack around the mainmast trunk, and its feeble light was sufficient to enable me, looking through the hinge-opening of my door, to see the intruding figure as it reached the end of the steps. It, or he, hesitated a moment, then poked his head into my room and stood listening. Evidently satisfied that the room was vacant, he left it and stole aft.

Though I had not seen his face I had no doubt of his identity. That it was the secretary I was positive, his tall figure making it plain without the additional knowledge of his motive for being there. I gave him time to get into the cabin, and then, pulling my revolver from my pocket, I followed, came to the curtain, rushed it back suddenly, and confronted him.

He had had no time to do more than stoop over the bags which the dim night-light in the cabin revealed piled near the trunks. As he caught sight of the leveled revolver, without the slightest exclamation he threw both hands aloft and stood in the attitude of a "hold-up," his face bearing a look of consternation difficult to describe. My first impulse was to call the captain, but the situation was such, that I thought—and thought quickly—I might better deal with the fellow alone and report later.

I stepped into the room, holding the curtain back with one hand while covering him with my weapon in the other, and with my head motioned him forward. He obeyed without a word, and together we went along the passage. As we came to the steps he was about to go up, but I said, "In here, Mr. Fosse!" and taking him by the arm led him into my room, closing the door behind me. Lighting my lamp, I waved him to the chair I had vacated.

"Well, sir," I said, seating myself on the edge of the bed that I might have sufficient room between us and at the same time making a display of the revolver, "what have you to say?"

He looked at me through half closed eyes and cleared his throat. "*Señor*—I do not happen to have the happiness of knowing your name."

"Ransome," I returned. "And now that you have

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

that beatitude you will please explain your errand in full."

"It has been explained before," he said slowly, "and I beg to assure you I am unarmed. If you will kindly play your weapon in some other direction—"

I replaced the revolver in my pocket.

"That is better—between gentlemen," he continued. "I—I admit I have been foolish—but the marking of my bag—"

"Yes?" I drawled, in imitation of his suddenly assumed ease of manner. "So you attempted, by sneaking, what you were unable to accomplish above-board. You knew what my orders were. You also knew—while you were talking to Diaz forward—that the captain had come aboard. Why did you not apply to him if your wish was legitimate?"

As I indicated my knowledge of his talking with Diaz he pricked up his ears and his dark face grew darker, but the ease of his manner did not lessen as he replied:

"I said I was foolish, *Señor* Ransome. I beg to apologize. I commend you for your watchfulness and will report it to *Señor* Basco. To him I will explain all; to him it will be clear. I am his confidant, *señor*—his private secretary. Could I do anything against my employer's interest? No—indeed, no, *señor*."

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

He shrugged his shoulders as only a Latin can do. I made no answer, and for more than a minute we sat looking each at the other.

“And that being settled,” he finally said, rising to his feet and looking about the room, “there is nothing to be gained by further words. I am glad you did your duty. What an exceedingly comfortable apartment you have here! It is greatly improved under Mr. Connelly.”

I conceived it likely that the late first mate had had an eye to his own comfort in fitting it, but I did not consider his remark worthy of an answer; I had enough else to think about. Should I press the matter, now that I had done my duty? I concluded not to, for the line between duty and supererogation is not always plainly drawn.

Fosse stepped to the mirror, perhaps to see if his face was bearing out the lightness of his last words, for a meaningless smile displayed his teeth as he airily disposed of the subject. As his eyes fell from a quick contemplation of his own image, they lit upon the knife I had captured. I remembered having tossed it from my suit case onto the carved shelf under the glass. He picked it up, his smile dying instantly.

“Ah, *señor!* What is this?”

“Kindly put it down, sir,” I said.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

He did not obey, but instead read the name engraved on the handle. .

"This is mine, *Señor* Ransome."

"Put it down!" I commanded, drawing my revolver. He dropped the knife hastily.

"May I ask *Señor* Ransome where he obtained that?"

"You may," I returned, eyeing him steadily. "I took it by force a few days ago from a cowardly cur who assaulted me with it."

"Ah! Meaning—"

"Meaning your brother, *Señor* Fosse."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed softly, a glint coming to his black eye. "I had missed it. He took it from me. You have no objection to returning it to its owner. It belonged to my father."

"Yes? Are you or is your brother or your father to be credited with the notch on the handle?" I asked. The man's smooth, dark face turned livid in the lamp-light, but he controlled himself, merely biting his lip.

"Will you not give it to me?"

"No."

"As you please, *señor*; but you should realize that you are increasing the difficulty between us."

The fellow's insulting manner maddened me more than his words. Did he think me a fool? I stood up.

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

"We will not consider the subject," I said. "There will be no difficulties between us but those I am capable of handling, Mr. Fosse. I will bid you good night. I only wish to add that the next person who attempts to penetrate into this part of the vessel while it is closed will be shot without question. Allow me to show you the way to the deck, sir."

He bowed with the same slight bending and the same sardonic grin he had used on our first encounter in the cock-pit, but he made no objection to preceding me up the booby steps. As we reached the deck he turned and said:

"Mr. Ransome, possibly you will understand me when I say that our books—yours and mine—are not balanced yet. I beg you will not forget it."

"I understand you perfectly, Mr. Fosse," I returned, with the same air of excessive politeness he was using, "and if you are wise you will not attempt to force that balance, sir. Do you comprehend?"

He again bowed stiffly, and turning I left him—but I bolted the hatch door behind me.

CHAPTER VII

A BAD START

I TOOK breakfast with Captain Delano the next morning.

"We have work to do—you and I," said he when we were alone, waving his hand toward the pile of baggage that blocked the room, "and we must work without witnesses. The fewer who know where this small truck is put, the better. I couldn't do it alone, and so trust you to help me. You will carefully preserve the secret."

"Certainly," I returned, for I was ready to believe the boxes contained gold and saw the necessity of caution. "Which belong to the secretary?"

"Two of the trunks—nothing more—and they are marked. The trunks are personal baggage, and go into the different rooms. I do not refer to them. It is those bags and boxes I want to stow."

Remembering that Fosse had been anxious about a certain box or bag I thought this curious, but I said nothing on the subject, nor did I mention my adventure of the previous night: I hardly felt that I needed a defender.

We ate in silence for a time, but finally Delano looked up.

"I forgot to ask, are you married, Mr. Ransome?"

"No," I answered.

"Nor so far beside yourself as to be in love?"

"No, I have never had time for such matters—and lack inclination."

"I am glad of it," he replied soberly. "There is no such double-distilled ass as the mature male in love. Take Fosse, for instance."

"Is he in love?" I asked carelessly.

"An infatuated idiot. It has warped his judgment, and increased the natural ugliness of his temper. He is gone on his employer's ward, and has no more chance with her than I, who am old enough to be her father. But the fool absolutely thinks she admires him."

"May I ask her name?"

"Montagna—Violette Montagna—the daughter of Basco's late partner, who, by the bye, was the backbone of the concern. She is something more than half American, and used to live in New York when her brother was there. Come, let's get to work, and see that we will not be interrupted."

He touched the bell and the steward appeared. I went on deck and saw that Turk was on guard at the main hatch. Telling him not to allow us to be

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

disturbed until notified, I went down again. The table had been cleared, and I saw the silk curtains had been drawn across the skylight.

“Lock every door leading here,” said Delano as he came from his room, with nothing on but an undershirt and a pair of old trousers, “then strip yourself like me. It’s going to be hot work.” I obeyed orders, and when I came into the cabin again, Delano was on his knees under the table, where he was loosening the bolts which held it to the deck.

Freeing it, we pushed it aside and rolled back the rug. Nothing appeared but the bare, hardwood floor, but the captain unscrewed and lifted a six-foot section, revealing a hatch-cover, into which was fixed a ring. This he raised, and beneath there yawned the black hole of a shallow lazarette, or afterhold. I bent down and thrust my shoulders in. It was some eight feet deep and perhaps ten square. There appeared to be several boxes, like coffin cases, at one end; otherwise the pit was empty.

“Arms,” said Delano in answer to my inquiring gaze. “We will get some of them out first.”

Arms! I was about to ask why arms in such a quantity were stored on a vessel intended for a mere pleasure cruise, when I suddenly remembered Delano’s injunction to repress my curiosity regarding anything out of the ordinary, and promptly smoth-

A BAD START

ered the exclamation which rose to my lips. And, after all, I thought, why not arms? Would any vessel put to sea without them, especially one carrying a considerable amount of money and having forward a crew of a nation whose passions are set on a hair trigger?

Having thus explained the matter to myself I dropped into the hold with a hammer and chisel. It was terribly hot and close, and the perspiration was pouring from me by the time I had ripped off the covers of two cases and handed up the arms, or enough of them to fill the arms-rack. There were only a dozen Winchester rifles and as many revolvers, and I passed up six of each with their ammunition.

I renailed the covers, and then came the stowing of the boxes and bags. It was terrible work, the captain exchanging places with me and checking off on a list every article I sent down to him. Half a dozen trunks followed the smaller stuff, and when the job was completed Delano's face was the color of a boiled lobster and I was exhausted.

When we had replaced the hatch, floor and rug, and rebolted the table, Delano said: "Now take a bath and get yourself in order before going on deck. The crew can shift the personal luggage to the proper rooms."

In two hours more that had been done, the cabin

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

cleared, and the trunks distributed. It was during this task that I saw the rest of the rooms for the first time. The owner had two, communicating, on the port side, they being sumptuously furnished; the secretary's was opposite, and the ward's, about whom I had plenty of unsatisfied curiosity, was forward of Fosse's and seemed fitted for a very dainty occupant, being decorated in blue, white and gold. From somewhere the steward brought the hangings and cushions belonging to the main cabin, the piano was unswathed, books filled the empty racks, and by the middle of the afternoon the place appeared complete in every detail.

At noon the captain went ashore, saying he would communicate with me later, and as there was nothing allowed in the way of ship's work I set the hands at cleaning brass and polishing wood. To an outsider the yacht might have been asleep and looked fair to stay hitched to the rotting pier indefinitely. The jib-boom was as yet unrigged, the awnings were still stretched, and an air of tropical laziness pervaded the scene. With the captain's permission I had let five hands go ashore with instructions to be back by sunset.

As for myself, though I was physically inert, my mind was active enough. There was a mystery about the late proceedings that was not satisfactory to me,

A BAD START

and yet, for the life of me, I could not find enough to warrant my worry. The most disquieting matter was the secrecy surrounding the date and hour of sailing; as for my want of knowledge of our destination, that might depend upon the passing whim of the owner; perhaps Delano was equally ignorant.

I passed the afternoon in trying on my new uniforms and disposing of my belongings about my room. I dined and supped alone. At sunset back came the hands—all but one of them, whom we never saw again. I wished the missing man had been Diaz; but no, he was on deck and apparently in the best of spirits. We were now reduced to nine men forward, counting boatswain, cook, and carpenter, while the regular complement should have been fourteen.

Darkness came down and the watch was set. At exactly eight bells (eight o'clock), I received this note:

Rig out your jib-boom. Get a line on the bitts ready to lead to a boat. We will tow out to a fairway. Offer no information.

DELANO.

Without a doubt this meant sailing, but I suddenly remembered that, though it might be natural enough for the passengers to come aboard after dark, thus avoiding the heat of the day, it was very strange that

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the *Siesta* should attempt to leave the harbor of Matanzas between sunset and sunrise, for the law forbade any foreign bottom entering or leaving any port in Cuba between those hours.

And the *Siesta* was an American bottom, built in Boston and cleared from Savannah, Georgia, as the captain had once told me. She had every right to fly the American ensign and I knew she had it in her signal locker, though for the matter of that, she had the flag of every nation as well as the code signals. But as yet I had never seen her display a scrap of bunting nor knew of her owning a private signal, though of course she must have possessed the latter.

However, having nothing to do with that, I obeyed orders. The awnings were taken in, the jib-boom rigged in place, and every stay made taut. This done, I got a line to the bitts and lowered the quarter-boat, that it might be in readiness.

The young moon had long been gone when all was completed. Ten o'clock came and though under ordinary circumstances the crew would have turned in, they hung together forward as though they scented something unusual.

Eleven o'clock came, and twelve o'clock and no one appeared. The crew, having given up interest in the outlook, turned in, leaving only the watchman on duty forward. There was a very light, cool breeze

A BAD START

wafting from the sea and the tide was almost slack water on the flood. I was getting sleepy and impatient and was having queer thoughts and growing unaccountably nervous when I heard the distant whistle of the locomotive of the incoming train from Havana, and the next moment a carriage came rumbling down the pier.

I pulled myself together and went to the gangway to meet the company. They came aboard and passed me silently as I held the lantern; two men and two women, besides the captain. I recognized the owner and his secretary, but the women's faces I could not well see. I noticed, however, that one was stout and rolled rather than walked.

The captain stepped aboard last. He stopped as he came abreast of me and spoke in a low voice.

"Get your boat manned, Mr. Ransome. You have done well. Cast off the lines and pull the schooner's head around. I think she will go off with the ebb. That's all. Be sharp and silent about it."

I heard the carriage drive away and went forward to rouse Turk.

"I make bold to arsk what's up, Mr. Ransome?" he said, scratching his ear after I had given him the orders.

"I don't know," I replied, "save that we are going out. You have your instructions—obey them."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"All right, sir," he said, swallowing hard, "but this beats all my goin' a-fishin.' "

It beat mine also, but I could say nothing on the subject to him, and all my attention was now centered on getting the schooner under way. The boat was sent out with the tow line and the pier fastenings cast off, these things being done in a silence that to me was portentous.

In a few minutes the bow of the schooner slowly turned and pointed down the bay. But for the loud splash of oars ahead, as they tore the water, and the creak of the straining line, there was no sound about us. A few lights from the moored vessels twinkled over the bay, but the city behind the dark pier lay asleep and silent.

The stern of the vessel was not ten feet from the pier, when Captain Delano came up, followed by Mr. Basco and the secretary. Neither of the latter spoke to me, but Fosse began pacing the deck nervously, keeping his eyes fixed on the slowly receding pier-head as though in momentary expectation of something.

"Mr. Ransome," said Delano, taking the wheel from me, "go forward and the instant we are free to make sail call in the boat."

I obeyed, and in a moment stood by the bitts. This thing was too much like sneaking to suit my mind,

A BAD START

but I thought that presently it would clear. Inch by inch we made way, the boat's crew swearing volubly in undertones as they labored on the heavy drag. It was a long time before I thought it safe to make sail. Then I called in the boat and ran aft to report.

"Get her under main and fore canvas, but don't sing out."

I issued the order, and, between creaking blocks, rattling hoops, and the ripple of reefing points, there was more or less sound that would show any experienced ear that a vessel was getting under way.

I was ready for the jibs and was standing in the waist waiting for the order, when clear through the night air I heard the rapid beat of horses' hoofs on the abandoned pier, and almost immediately after came the hail through the darkness:

"Siesta, ahoy!"

We were not a quarter of a mile away.

At the call the secretary jumped to the rail and sang out something in return, but I did not understand what. I saw Delano drop the wheel, stride to the man and strike him. Basco, who stood near, retreated across the deck. The secretary turned and swore.

"Siesta, ahoy! Come to at once," repeated the voice.

"Not by a damned sight!" roared Delano, shaking

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

his fist in the direction of the hail.

"Then I'll board you," was the answer. "Is Basco with you?"

"No," shouted Delano.

"You lie," was the hoarse return.

"Get up the jibs, Mr. Ransome, and look alive, sir," said the captain, without further concealment. "Stand by the sheets! Close haul—close haul," he ordered as the jibs rattled up the stays. "We'll try conclusions with that party, whoever he is."

The wind was light, and close hauled on the port tack we were barely moving. I went aft and again stood in the waist. I could see that the captain had given the wheel to one of the crew and now stood talking earnestly to Basco. Fosse had disappeared. Again came the hail:

"*Siesta*, ahoy!"

There was no answer.

"I am coming. You had better heave to and avoid trouble. I have Mr. Martinez with me."

The clear voice was earnest, and, coming on the still night it seemed to fill the bay, and, moreover, there was something in its timbre that startled me by its familiarity. Yet I could not place it, though even then, enigmatical as were the conditions surrounding me, the tone aroused something in my mind, just as a familiar odor or an old tune will bring

A BAD START

back old associations which flit away before the brain can grasp their full meaning.

To the latest cry, which appeared to be more like a threat than a piece of information, there was no answer from the yacht, but both Delano and Basco went to the taffrail and peered astern. I could see nothing, but now I could distinctly hear the rise, fall, and splash of oars as the sound came through the quiet night.

Whoever it was, he was chasing us, and with fair prospects of catching us, too, as we would have to make one or two tacks before laying our course, and the wind was without weight. My wonder and uneasiness was increasing when I heard a breathing close to me and, turning, saw Fosse at my elbow. He had come up through the booby hatch.

"*Señor* Ransome, you heard that call?"

"I did," I replied.

"And saw Delano strike me?"

"What of it?"

"*Señor*," he said in a fierce whisper, "if you will do anything to stop us—to allow those yonder to come aboard—I will forgive you all—all our differences. I will also give you a thousand dollars. I can—"

He was interrupted by the captain, who called my name. I would have told Fosse he was promising

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

much to revenge a blow, when the diversion came. I turned away without answering, and went aft.

"Mr. Ransome," said Delano, "Mr. Basco wishes to speak to you."

The little man stepped from the rail and thrust out his small hand.

"Mr. Ransome," he said in a soft voice, "I did not understand when I met you yesterday that you were an officer of my vessel. I beg to apologize for my inattention. I am glad to have you aboard, sir."

That was a lie—a conciliatory lie—meant to interest my good will, if nothing more, and I knew it as well as though I had documentary proof. From that instant my dislike for Basco became active; I had never taken to him, but now I distrusted him, though perforce I lifted my cap and took his proffered hand. It was as cold as a fish and gave no grasp.

"I think we are going to be overhauled, Mr. Ransome," put in Delano, easily, and as though the matter was of trifling importance.

"I think so, sir," I returned, as I heard the clear sound of the coming boat. "Perhaps," I continued, "you did not understand the hail. It was that Mr. Martinez was there."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Basco, his thin voice coming out like the crack of a whip. "Mr. Martinez is

A BAD START

in Europe. He would not come to Cuba without notifying me weeks ahead."

"Nor approach us in that fashion," said Delano, addressing the owner, though I felt his remark was for my benefit. Then he turned directly to me.

"Send a couple of hands aft with belaying pins, Mr. Ransome. You may go below if you desire. This is an unwarrantable intrusion and will be met as a gross outrage, but you need not be a witness nor become involved in the difficulty."

"Is that a command, sir?" I asked.

"I think you had better so construe it," he replied sharply.

At that moment there came a clearer hail, and I saw the oncoming boat, now something more than a formless shadow. I heard the splash and heave of four oars and saw two men sitting astern. As I looked, one stood up and shouted:

"I shall board you, Captain Delano, and if I am interfered with I shall fire at you."

"Fire and be damned!" said Delano without moving. "Mr. Ransome, go below, sir."

CHAPTER VIII

SENOR BASCO'S WARD

I WAS standing near the cock-pit when Delano snapped out the order to me. I did not hesitate. I went down, glad enough not to be a witness to any tragedy that might occur on deck. That there was a mystery connected with the *Siesta* I no longer had a doubt, and was conscious that I had been fighting a fear which had at last become a certainty. What the nature of this mystery was I had no means of knowing, but it seemed plain that Delano did not wish me connected with it, though his motive was as blank as the mystery itself.

I heard someone follow me, and turning saw it was Basco, but he did not offer to speak. His brows were knit as he passed into his own room. As I went by that of his ward I heard the girl singing as she moved about. The sound gave me comfort. Certainly, I thought, here is one who is neither overcome by fatigue nor weighted by a sense of mystery. I hurried by and into my room. The booby hatch was closed and no sound from the deck pene-

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

trated below. I placed my ear to a port, but being on the opposite side of the vessel I heard no sound of a fray, if a fray there was. My ear was tuned for the threatened pistol shot, but no shot came. I did catch the sound of loud voices, then the clattering of oars, but there was no confusion, no general alarm, and the schooner glided along without shifting a point.

I was curious enough as to Captain Delano's attitude toward those in the boat as well as the private secretary's interest in the same parties. The owner's position, too, was puzzling. It was a mixed up mess the unravelling of which lay beyond my powers, and upon my soul, I might have been vastly troubled had it not been for the voice of the young lady who was singing away like a lark in her own room. Surely she was intimate enough with her guardian, the secretary, and even the captain, to have a knowledge of their affairs and would be silent were there anything serious in the wind.

After a few minutes of intense listening, during which I could hear no more sounds from the deck, I stepped from my room and went aft along the passage. As I passed Basco's cabin I saw the door was open, and the interior of the elegant apartment was fully displayed. The owner sat on a chair, his body

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

bent forward and his face buried in his hands like one in the depths of despair.

His corpulent wife sat in front of him, her fat figure gorgeously clothed, her beflowered hat still on her head. She was speaking in a low voice and shaking her jeweled finger at him, much as a woman would do who scolded an erring child.

The heavy carpet on the passage made my presence unsuspected. I went on, and was about to draw aside the curtain to the cabin when I heard the voices of Delano and another man as the two came down the companionway. The new voice was that of the man who had hailed us, and although he was speaking in a low tone, its familiarity again impressed me, but I failed to place it. "We can finish the matter and explain all in a short conference," I heard Delano say, as he led the way to his own room. I did not care to have the captain see me at that time, and, therefore, did not draw the curtain of the passage, but retreated to the deck by way of the booby hatch near my room.

The first man I saw was Turk, who was standing by the rail in the waist, looking over the side, his great figure looming black against the bulwark. I touched him on the shoulder.

"Who has the deck?" I asked.

"The schooner's runnin' herself, sir. Captain De-

SENOR BASCO'S WARD

lano went below with a party from the boat alongside, an' I tell ye, sir, she'll be towed under if the wind gets stronger an' they don't cast loose."

I noticed then that the breeze had suddenly strengthened, and we were sliding quite rapidly through the water. I looked over the side. The boat was trailing along in a smother of foam, and the figures of three men were huddled astern to keep her nose up.

"Was there any trouble when she came alongside?" I asked.

"Only a lot o' loud jaw, sir. No blows nor the like o' that; no knockin' down nor pitchin' overboard. Cap'n Delano arsked one o' the gents to come up alone, an' he comes—that's all, sir."

"Where's Mr. Fosse?"

"He's for'rd, sir, gammin' with Diaz. It's all hands to-night, it seems, an' the devil to pay, mayhap."

"Things will straighten out to-morrow, Turk. I am going below again."

I was about to step to the hatch when I saw Delano come up from the cabin. He was alone, as could be seen by the light that shot from the doors, but to his eye I was invisible in the darkness. I saw him walk deliberately to the rail and cast off the painter of the trailing boat. There came a roar of protesting shouts, but Delano turned his back to the already

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

vanished trio and proceeded to light a cigar. Then he walked forward, and I dove below.

Mightily disturbed in mind, I proceeded to light my lamp. As the wick kindled I was startled to recognize the private secretary standing in the doorway. Where he had come from I could only guess. He hung irresolute for a moment, then faltered out:

"*Señor*, I spoke to you on deck, making some non-sensical proposition. I beg you to forget it. It was said in the heat of passion. May I ask that you will not repeat my words?"

There was such a change in the man's demeanor that I flashed a look of suspicion at him—a look he met calmly enough, though his long, thin hands worked nervously.

"I have no interest in the matter, Mr. Fosse," I said. "I cannot conceive my mentioning it without a strong motive, and I have none at present."

He did not appear to be satisfied, but he left me, and I heard him go to his room. I looked out of mine, and saw that Basco's was now closed. All was quiet, and I went to bed.

At four o'clock I went on deck and relieved Delano, who met me as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, not even making a reference to the events of the night. The weather was fine. Both fore and main gaff-topsails had been added and under

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

the pressure of the fresh breeze the *Siesta* was going through the water like a steamboat.

"You will make the course east by south, Mr. Ransome," said Delano, moving toward the companion-way. "Broadly, we are to run through the Windward Channel to Jamaica, touching at Kingston, where I hope to pick up a second mate I know. By the way, at the first calm Mr. Basco wishes the yacht painted white. It will be cooler. After breakfast we will get the men into regular watches." Then he approached me closely and spoke so that the man at the wheel could not hear. "I wish you to choose Diaz, sir," he continued. "I wish you to keep him under your eye. I have a suspicion that Diaz remained on board for a purpose not consistent with the welfare of this vessel, though I cannot convince Mr. Basco of the fact, neither can I act as I wish to without appearing too summary. But I would welcome a move on the rascal's part. I could then get rid of him."

"Very good, sir," I said. I understood the force of his words and had the same feeling regarding Diaz. In a few minutes Delano went below, leaving me the satisfaction of at least knowing our route and first destination.

When I was relieved in the morning and went to breakfast, I found a young lady sitting alone at the

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

table. I had never seen her face before, but I knew she could be none other than the owner's ward, Miss Violette Montagna. Her face lighted with a pretty smile that displayed her even teeth, and her brown eyes were as frank as a boy's as she greeted me with a bright "good morning." I answered in Spanish, as a compliment, at which she drew her brows into a little frown and exclaimed in English:

"For goodness' sake, don't! I am sick of Spanish! When things go wrong, everything is in Spanish! I was always scolded in Spanish and petted in English! I hate Spanish! You can speak English. You are Mr. Ransome, are you not, and the first officer?"

I bowed and took my seat opposite her. I fell before her at once, as nine men out of ten would have done. Not that I was in love; I was not quite such a fool; but she might then and there have commanded me to do anything reasonable and even something slightly unreasonable, and I would have found an excuse for the latter, and obeyed. Very fortunate it is that women do not know their power over men; it is quite enough that we are aware of it. As the girl ceased speaking she looked steadily at me, as though she would put me in a proper niche in her estimation; then she asked seriously:

"What was that noise on deck last night, Mr. Ransome?"

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

I told her it was my watch below at midnight, and that nothing had been reported.

"Well," she said, laughing lightly, "I'm sure I don't know what it was all about, and I'm sure I'm glad to see some one who doesn't carry a secret in his face. My guardian has been a bear for nearly a month; Captain Delano treats me like a child; Madame has her own troubles, but has the grace to carry them alone, and Mr. Fosse—oh! what he knows and won't tell is something wonderful. It is a strange trip this time; all hurry, hush and mystery! What is the secret, Mr. Ransome?"

"I am sure my penetration is unequal to probing it if it exists," I answered, laughing. I was relieved and refreshed by the sight of her handsome young face, and was drawn toward her by her very frankness. She, at least, was not burdened with a secret.

"It will be a weary trip," she said, leaning back with a mock sigh.

"Not for all of us," I returned, though I did not mean to be pointed. She made no answer, but her big brown eyes continued to search my face, and there was still a delicate pucker on her fine arched brows.

"Where have I seen you before?" she asked abruptly.

"Nowhere, to my knowledge," I truthfully replied.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"But I have. Oh, no! I know what it is! It is only a resemblance! You look like a friend of my brother. I never saw him—only his photograph. He was at Yale, you know; a Mr.—Mr.— Oh, yes! Raymond! And he was a sailor, too! I remember now!"

It was fortunate that she jumped up at that moment and ran to the piano. I felt the blood go to my face with a rush. Her reference to Yale and a Mr. Raymond who was a sailor was something more than a coincidence, though I was positive I had never known a man by the name of Montagna.

Her fingers rippled over the keys in a manner that showed much technical skill, but there was no pretension to more than a joyous running of the scale, and now and then a dashing chord. As she sat with her profile toward me she made a bewitching picture, and her every line, from the pile of soft, dark hair on her finely poised head to the delicately arched instep of her little foot, spoke of the aristocrat. I took her to be a lovely, careless, light-hearted daughter of the South (though she lacked the swarthy of the Spaniard) but I had not then probed the depth of her sweet seriousness and the sterling sense and courage of which she was capable. Suddenly the swift play of her fingers ceased and she spun around.



SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

"Did you ever go to Yale?" she asked, facing me.

"Yes; but it seems a long time ago."

"And did you never know my brother?"

"Never."

"Nor Mr. Raymond?"

"I hardly think they were of my time—if you speak from your own recollection, Miss Montagna."

She was about to reply when, like an evil genius, Fosse came into the cabin. The girl merely nodded to him, and swung back to the instrument while the private secretary joined her, talking in a low, confidential manner for a moment, an act, I was perfectly aware, intended to impress me. There were no confidences made in return, the girl seemingly intent on her playing, and presently the secretary sat down at the table. I finished my meal and left him feasting his eyes on her beauty, for if ever a man wore his heart on his sleeve it was *Señor* Gabriel Fosse.

The next few days were passed in a soft dream of splendid weather and blue seas, making mere existence so fair that my fears failed to assert themselves, and I was lulled into a feeling of security by the fact that nothing occurred to arouse them. I became acquainted with the ship's company and with the passengers. Basco rarely had a word to say to me, but he was soft-voiced and soft-footed and I often found him standing near me when I was far from suspecting

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

his presence. He certainly was not being benefited by the voyage thus far, for a more nervous and pucker-browed individual I never knew. He was forever running to Delano for a private word or two, holding his face up with a look of eager reliance to the big man who bent to listen. To me he appeared to lack self-confidence and was always demanding a moral pat on the back.

His wife, or "Madame," as she was called, was the most negative, unlovable, unhateable character possible. Though the two might be in each other's presence on deck for hours, I never knew a word to pass between them. The lady had lost her good looks—if, indeed, she ever possessed any; she was stout to grossness, and her dull brain appeared to be as fat as her body. I rarely heard her voice, and no one paid her more than trivial attention. Her occupation was to sit on deck and busy herself with some manner of fluffy stuff, her heavily jewelled fingers in a continual flash of motion.

Fosse was the only one with whom I was on distinctly bad terms, unless it might have been Diaz also, who was now in my watch. The latter individual I cared nothing for; the former kept aloof from me, only approaching when I happened to be in conversation with Miss Montagna, and then it was plain

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

that the demon of jealousy sat on his shoulder and directed him.

The young lady was as unconventional as possible, but she never expressed further curiosity about me. The full extent of her beauty grew on me as the days slipped by; not in a way to make me languish for her, but I was glad she was on board and equally glad that I was sailing under a false name, so far as she was concerned. I would not have had her know my past and the fact that I was a failure in life. My mental attitude should have opened my eyes, but it did not.

During these days I saw little of Delano. He walked his watch regularly, but when I relieved him he would go at once to his own cabin. So wedded to privacy had he grown that even his meals were carried to his room.

At the end of the fifth day's run the wind fell flat, and as we were to the leeward of one of the numerous *cays* that sprinkle the face of the Bahama Channel, we dropped anchor near a desolate and barren sand-bank that rose above the surface of the sea like a half-submerged skull, and there painted the *Siesta* white. I could not conceive why this had not been done long before, though the solution of the question came soon enough. White she was made, alow and aloft, every spar being painted, the change

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

so altering the schooner that she was hardly recognizable.

But that was not all. My sleeping suspicions were again aroused to full activity when Delano ordered me to strike and stow the foretopmast. This brought us down to the rig of a trader, and, save that our spars were longer and there was a plentiful glitter of brass, we might have passed as a rather luxurious coaster. It was plain to me that the vessel was being disguised, and, of course, for a purpose, though what that purpose could possibly be was to me far out of soundings.

It was broiling hot and I was glad when the work was done and we were once more under way. Down through the Windward Channel we went, a sinister something growing stronger and stronger as the days passed. But nothing out of the common showed itself excepting that now Basco was almost light-hearted at times, and once I heard him laugh; it was a feeble cackle and not such a laugh as an open-natured man would give. I had conjectured over the problem confronting me until I was sick of it. What other mission than that of pleasure could the yacht have? Piracy? Absurd in these times, and with such a crew, and with women on board! Treasure hunting? Possibly; but we were in no way equipped. Fillibustering? Nonsense! What then? I gave it

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

up and determined simply to do my duty and let the future shape itself.

We spoke several vessels going north, but as though fearful of being overhauled we bore away west and out of the track of regular navigation, going well nigh around Jamaica and approaching Kingston from the west instead of the east, as would have been more natural.

I had the deck as we ran up the beautiful harbor, Delano and Basco being in close confab in the latter's cabin. I knew Kingston perfectly well, and the white and green houses looked lovely against the hills behind them. One may anchor nearly anywhere in the bay in six fathoms of water and find good holding ground, and as I supposed we were to lie here a day or so, complete our stores, and take on more hands, I was planning for a good berth within easy distance of the town. I was shaping our course for such a spot when Delano came on deck, looked quietly about him and came over to me.

"You will lay to and lower a quarter-boat," he said. "I am going ashore. Don't work in further, but lay off and on until I return."

This was a strange command, inasmuch as we were yet at least three miles from the town, and it would mean a long and hard pull for the men. However, I obeyed the order to lay to and presently saw Fosse

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

come up and get into the lowered boat. When Delano appeared I noticed he had changed his uniform for a plain white costume and wore a Panama hat; there was nothing about him to suggest a yacht's captain. The boat was cast off and the two men were pulled away. As the boat dwindled in the distance Basco came from below and walked up to me.

"You will place the English ensign at the peak, Mr. Ransome," he said in his soft voice, in which was the suggestion of a lisp; "you will also keep well from shore."

I looked at him in wonder, but called Turk and gave him the order. Basco did not appear to notice my look; his eyes were fixed on the distant fort, over which hung the crimson speck of the British flag.

"Do you suppose they could hit a vessel of our size from there?" he asked, raising his jewel-bedecked hand and pointing a shapely finger at the fort.

"As easily as a boy smashes a rotten apple, sir," I replied. "They could pot us with absolute accuracy if there was an object in their doing so."

He paced the deck a moment and then came close to me. "Mr. Ransome," he began, shifting his glasses and turning his eyes so that they only caught mine for the fraction of a second, "do you know where we are going?"

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

"If not to Kingston—no," I replied.

"No, I suppose not. I have asked Captain Delano to tell you, but he refused. I will tell you. We are going to Venezuela, Mr. Ransome."

"And from there?" I asked as he hesitated.

"At present I know no more than that; but I will say that I have an offer from President Castro for this schooner to add to his navy. Should this become known we might be in danger of confiscation by the insurgents. They have spies everywhere; they are doubtless on the lookout for us. That is why the color and rig of the schooner have been altered." He made an effort toward pulling his slightly bent figure straight.

"Is this a filibustering expedition that I have been beguiled into, sir?" I demanded, the blood rushing into my face.

"By no means—by no means," he said, raising his hand in protest. "It is all perfectly legitimate. I have the right to offer my boat to a recognized government, have I not?"

"Undoubtedly, sir. And that will end the voyage, then," I said, for it did not occur to me that the man might be lying.

"Unless you should choose to remain as an officer, *señor*. It might be the chance of your life. Do you follow me?"

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"I follow you so far, sir, as to see that I have been hoodwinked into shipping on a pleasure craft when pleasure was not the object of the voyage."

"Subterfuge has been necessary," he answered. "Not a soul on board save Captain Delano and myself knows of this, but you will be no loser in any event. I will make up to you any pecuniary loss. The Venezuelan navy is not strong; it needs vessels."

I thought the latter likely enough, for the Venezuelan navy came as near being a name and nothing more, as was possible. "Then I am to understand that my engagement terminates when we reach Caracas?" I returned, still hot.

He saw my temper.

"You are hardly correct," he returned softly. "Should *Señor* Castro decline my terms, the voyage will proceed. Until this is decided, you are bound by your papers to remain as you are. What I wish to know is whether you will stand by me in case this vessel is menaced by any force? That is why I have spoken."

"Under what flag do you sail, sir?" I asked.

"The United States flag," he said quickly. "We are an American bottom—cleared from an American port."

"While we are under that flag, I will defend the

SEÑOR BASCO'S WARD

schooner, you may rest assured," I returned warmly. "So far, you may depend upon me."

"On the whole, it is all I have a right to ask," he said.

He turned and left me. "And on the whole," I thought, as his narrow body disappeared down the companionway, "I am glad the mystery of this voyage is cleared away."

CHAPTER IX

SOMETHING HAPPENS

As the yacht crawled to and fro across the broad bay I had plenty to think about, and the more I thought of Basco's information the less I liked it. At this late period I have a fair view of the matter in its proper perspective and am now perfectly aware of the reason for my disappointment. I assert that my first flash of resentment was not for myself, and it should have opened my eyes to all that had come over me when I recognized that my consideration was for Basco's ward and not for another soul on board.

How was she to bear this sudden transplanting? Why had she been kept in ignorance of such an important step while her liberty, and perchance her life, would be in jeopardy should the Venezuelan insurgents attempt to seize the schooner? These things occurred to me, and did not point to a possible lie on Basco's part, but they did point to the fact that I was in danger of being parted from a girl to whom I was less than nothing, in my own estima-

SOMETHING HAPPENS

tion, and yet I was hurt without then knowing what was hurting me.

It was perhaps four hours before the boat came back. When it hove in sight the men were pulling hard, as they might pull if they were being urged. I hauled into the wind and let them come aboard.

No sooner was the boat drawn to its davits than Delano told me to make sail out of the harbor. He was greatly excited.

As Basco came on deck to meet him, Delano went up to him, and, pulling a newspaper from his pocket, pointed his thick finger at some item in it, threw it down on the cabin house with an outspoken oath, and went below in a rage. Fosse said not a word, but stood by with a sneering expression until Delano had gone. Then he took Mr. Basco by the arm and they followed the captain below. I noticed that the owner's face was green, but whether from fright or anger I did not know.

Miss Violette, who had just come from her cabin and was seated in the cock-pit, was a witness to this, but she did not move, though her face took on a look of troubled amazement. She turned to me and inquired with her eyes, but I could only shake my head in ignorance.

After giving the order to put the helm up and trim the sails, I walked over to the cabin house and picked

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

up the neglected paper, thinking only to get some shore item that might be of general interest. I saw it was a Kingston journal, and was about to spread it open when Delano came up, red-faced with passion.

As he saw me with the paper he strode over and snatched it from me, as though I was in mortal danger from its touch. I was white-hot in an instant.

"What is that for, sir?" I said, facing him.

He pulled himself up, as though suddenly realizing what he had done.

"It is not intended for a personal affront, Mr. Ransome, but there is matter in this which, to be frank, I wish no one but Mr. Basco to see."

"You command here," I returned promptly; "but when we arrive at Caracas, to which port I understand we are going, I will ask you to sever our relations. I am not used to such conduct. Once free, I will refer to the matter again."

He looked at me steadfastly a moment, then held out his hand.

"Raymond," said he—"I mean Mr. Ransome—I am unfortunate in that I usually board you on the wrong side. You evidently know some things; well, then, if, at our arrival at Caracas, or La Guaira, I do not make this thing plain to you, I will not resist any step you may take. I have stood your friend, and

SOMETHING HAPPENS

am doing so now, if you but knew it. Think otherwise if you wish."

He left me abruptly and returned to the cabin with the paper. As I looked up I saw by the expression of her face that Miss Violette had heard every word that had been said. I bit my lip and took a turn on deck. As I swung around I saw the young lady standing where I would pass. She put herself before me as I neared her.

"Are we not going into Kingston?" she asked.

"No," I answered.

"Why not?"

"To be frank, I don't know. I wish I did."

"I saw you talking to my guardian, and knew you were angry. I heard what Captain Delano said to you. Is there trouble on board?"

"I am troubled, Miss Violette. That is all I can say, except that I will get to the bottom of it soon or my name is not Ransome."

She looked at me seriously, her beautiful eyes lifted to mine and searching my countenance. Her voice was low and soft as she replied:

"But your name is not Ransome. I heard Captain Delano call you Raymond."

The blood that bounded to my face must have told the story.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"It is Raymond," I returned desperately, "and I am sorry you know it."

"You wish to deceive me? Why?"

"Not to hide either a crime or a shame," I answered, trying to smile at her sweet earnestness.

"Why, then?" she demanded with a little stamp of impatience.

"I cannot tell you now, but I shall ask you to respect the secret. No one else knows the fact nor the reason, save Delano."

"But you denied knowing my brother!"

"I am not acquainted with your brother nor with any one of your name."

"Oh! Of course!" she returned, her face suddenly lighting. "How stupid of me! He is only my half-brother. Stetson—Stetson Delavan."

I was thunderstruck.

"Stet Delavan! Know Stet Delavan!" I exclaimed. "Is he your brother? He was my chum at Yale—long ago! I haven't seen him for five years nor heard from him for two. He went West."

"Yes. He is in New York now," she returned. "Papa bought him an interest in the house of Martinez & Co., for which Basco & Co. are agents. I wish Stetson was here now."

"I would to God he was," I said fervidly; "this thing is getting too thick for me!"

SOMETHING HAPPENS

And I was never more sincere. Had Stetson Delavan been with me I would willingly have faced any difficulty that might arise; but I was alone and missed the great-hearted, resourceful giant who had been my inseparable companion from the day I entered Yale until the sea separated us. It was hard for me to realize that this dainty bit of femininity was closely related to the staunchest friend I ever had and if there had been an unrecognized bond that had held me to the girl before, there was a very tangible one now.

I cannot say that Miss Montagna went into ecstasies at the knowledge that her brother and I were friends, but from that instant her manner changed toward me. She had been frank and ingenuous before, but never familiar with that familiarity a woman shows to a social equal; now, however, there was a tone of something like confidence as she spoke to me—an air of personal interest—perhaps her desire hitherto had been to express a kindly patronage toward one of her guardian's employees.

But be that as it may I recognized a new ring in her voice and a new light in her eyes as she expressed her pleasure, and as I am a firm believer in woman's intuitive judgment, it frequently being superior to man's reason, I at once resolved to tell Miss Violette what had passed between her guardian and myself, that she might be somewhat prepared

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

for the move. I would have begun the story then and there had not Fosse appeared, his thin, pale face and tall figure rising out of the companionway to blight my intention. As the girl saw him, she swung her back toward him and said in an undertone:

"Will you let me write to Stetson and tell him where you are? I know he—"

She was interrupted by the private secretary, who walked directly up to us. It was an intrusion so unwarranted that I blazed out at once. Somehow, I felt that this fellow was near the bottom of the trouble that hung over the yacht.

"It is a very hot day," he began, drawing a scented handkerchief across his smooth brow.

"It is," I replied, unable to restrain myself, "and you will find the weather as cool to leeward as on this side of the deck, Mr. Fosse. You are interrupting a conversation, sir."

The dark blood rushed to his face, and for a moment he looked equal to stabbing me. But without appearing to notice my remark he turned to the lady.

"Will Miss Violette take my arm for a promenade? I wish a few words with her."

"Not at present, *señor*," said the girl. "I have something to say to Mr. Ransome."

He bowed low and, I thought, mockingly.

"And I, also, will have something to say to *Señor*

SOMETHING HAPPENS

Ransome—when a better occasion offers,” he said, and retreated across the deck, the very devil shining in his black eye.

The young lady drew herself up as though insulted and the color fled from her cheeks. Turning to me she said:

“Look out for him, Mr. Ransome! Will you tell me what you know and what you fear? I feel as though we were old friends—through Stetson, of course. May I write to him about you?”

“I wish you would,” I said, “and I have something to tell you. There is now no opportunity to speak at length, but if you will permit me I will write what I have to say. I think you will find that you, too, need a friend. I believe the conditions are serious.”

Here I laughed aloud for the purpose of deceiving the man across the deck, and added in a low voice:

“Let us make an alliance mutually defensive. I think I can help you—I know you can help me.”

She caught my idea of deception and she, too, laughed as though my words had been the point of a story. But her next act astonished me as much as it must have maddened the jealous fool who was watching us. She held out her small hand as if to seal the compact. I took it and bent low over it; had

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

it not been broad day I would have raised it to my lips. Giving me a little nod, and with her eyes shining like stars, she left me and crossed to Fosse.

"Now, *señor*, I am at your service for this important communication."

With the easiest grace in the world she slipped her hand through his arm, and the two went forward.

In perhaps five minutes I saw her draw her hand away suddenly and go below. He looked after her blankly, pulled out paper and tobacco, rolled a cigarette, struck a match on his leg, took a deep breath of smoke and then strode over to me.

"*Señor*," he began; "I now have a word to say to you. "It is my desire that you should know that your duty does not lie in entertaining that young lady."

"It is your desire?" I returned, hardly looking at him. "And what possible interest can I have in what you do or do not desire?" I asked.

"For your own good I would have you consider it," he returned, his voice and face expressing the extent of his insane jealousy. "Your attentions are disagreeable to her, and my—my—prospects—give me the right to interfere in the matter."

I felt hot and cold at once.

SOMETHING HAPPENS

"Is this authoritative and from her?" I asked, feeling an unholy desire to strike him.

"You may so consider it," he returned with an air of triumph.

"But I do not so consider it, sir," I answered, and the very devil was twitching at my arm. He laughed aloud; a forced laugh, full of scorn.

"If you persist I shall know how to punish you. You are no gentleman, sir, to attempt to come between the lady and her wishes. You are a low poltroon—a fool—a—"

If my life had paid for it I could no longer have controlled myself. The smiling, lying face and the open insult offered while I was on duty were too much. I struck him then, but not with my fist. With my open hand I struck him across his mouth—struck him violently, driving the fire of his cigarette into his lips. He staggered back under the blow; his heels caught in the low rail of the cock-pit and into it he sprawled, just as Delano and Basco came on deck.

CHAPTER X

A CRISIS

THE maddened Cuban struggled to his feet with murder in his eye. He was about to spring toward me when Delano, who seemed to have an intuitive knowledge of affairs, grasped the secretary firmly by the collar.

"What is this?" he roared. "Was he interfering with you, Mr. Ransome?"

"He was, indeed."

"Get below, sir. Get from the deck," said Delano, shoving the man toward the cabin. "Mr. Basco, this fellow will ruin your affairs yet, if he hasn't done it already."

Fosse twisted from the captain's hold and backed away.

"I'll not go below!" he shouted. "Not for *Señor* Basco, nor for you, nor any one. None of you dare force my hand!"

His face was bloodless and his sallow skin made him look like a corpse. Had he been armed there

THE CRISIS

is small doubt that a tragedy would have taken place then and there.

Hearing the row, some of the hands came running aft, but they advanced no farther than the mainmast. The helmsman, his duty forgotten in his interest, let the schooner yaw widely; the sheets slackened and every sail began to thrash. I turned toward the fellow and in a fright he at once regained his bearings and we filled away. Basco said and did nothing; indeed, as was usual while in the presence of Delano, he seemed to be without spirit.

The captain and Fosse were now facing each other, the latter in a defiant attitude, and I could see that Delano's passion was surging within him.

"I'll not sully my hands with you," he said, "but I will be obeyed while I command this schooner, ye two-faced dog! Bo's'n!"

"On deck, sir," said Turk, stepping forward.

"Take that man below—down the booby hatch."

The old sailor touched his hatbrim as though he had received a common order and advanced on the secretary. Fosse swung himself around and prepared to resist, but he was as helpless as an infant in the hands of the old giant. He struggled for an instant, screaming with rage, but Turk, with one hand on his collar and the other on the slack of his trousers, half lifted him from the deck and urged him forward.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Faith, I can teach ye to walk Spanish if I don't happen to know the lingo," he said as he hustled his victim down the hatch and closed the door on him.

I overlooked the group of sailors who, no doubt, were mightily interested at the sight of a scrimmage aft. They remained quiescent enough, even ceasing their jabbering, but I saw Diaz stretching his neck as his patron was shoved from the deck in disgrace. He made no sign of anything but curiosity.

"I think I have the bearings of this thing," said Delano to me. "I won't even question you. It is your watch below. I will relieve you."

Violent as was this episode, it brought forth no immediate fruit, though I expected a serious result at once—something in the way of a loftily worded challenge, which of course I might laugh at; or, quite as likely, I might get a furtive knife-thrust in the dark. But in reality nothing happened. I was watchful against some treacherous blows from behind, but none came, and, during the quiet days that followed there was not the faintest ripple of excitement aboard. It is true that Fosse fell back into his old, dark taciturnity and avoided me in every possible way, even going so far as to leave the table if I sat down—for which I was thankful.

The girl and I were now openly friendly, but we both maintained a proper distance from each other,

THE CRISIS

though I was comforted in the knowledge of our understanding. I had written an account of Basco's conversation with me, but to my astonishment, when I gave it to her she treated it as though thankful it was nothing worse than the sale of the yacht that threatened. Doubtless to her the voyage was anything but pleasant, and equally doubtless, a return from Venezuela to her own home was the result she most wished. I could not wonder, though the contemplation of her absence was not pleasant to me.

It was at this time, when we were nearing the coast of South America, that we experienced the loss of a hand under the most tragic circumstances; a loss which probably had a later effect on me, and however it affected all on board and reduced the strength of the crew, seemed at the time to be personal only to the one who suffered.

We were going almost due south, bound for Caracas, and had been blessed with unusually fine weather, which, as an old sailor in those waters, led me to look for something in the way of a meteorological convulsion at no distant date. But as yet there was no absolute sign. The glass held high and steady and we sailed over a lovely sea to the music of the northeast trade.

We were within a day's sail of Caracas, and I was wondering where I would find myself that day week.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

It was the first dog watch and everyone was on deck save Fosse, who skulked below, when, without warning, rhyme or reason, the outer jib-halyard parted at the head of the sail, and the canvas, which was set flying, fell into the water and was sucked under the bow of the schooner. I ran forward and sent a man out on the boom to haul in the wreck, but it was heavy and had somehow become fouled on the eye of the bob-stay on the cutwater. The chap on the end of the spar shouted out the fact as he saw it, so I ordered another hand down the steel bob-stay to clear away the muss.

The water was not rough, though the long swells were fretted by the wind and danced in the sunlight of a true summer sea. The fellow who crawled out on the foot-rope was probably the most willing and faithiul man in the crew, Turk excepted, and I always felt that he would support me in case of trouble. As he bent down to grasp the sail somehow he lost his footing and his grip on the line he was fisting, and with a sharp cry he fell into the sea, the schooner immediately spinning over him.

At once there came the frenzied cry, "Man overboard!" in both English and Spanish, and I shouted for the helm to be thrown hard down and ordered the quarter-boat to be lowered; then I ran aft. At the call everyone jumped to the rail, the yacht cir-

THE CRISIS

cling into the wind. The boat ran half way down the davits and then something jammed, causing a delay while the falls were being overrun. I could see the man plainly, by then perhaps a cable's length away, and by the manner in which he struck out for the schooner I knew he had not been injured.

He was within ten fathoms of us by the time the falls were cleared and the boat was making for him and I looked upon him for as good as rescued, for he was a strong swimmer. It was then that I saw a triangular fin, like a piece of blackened tin, cutting the water and coming down toward the brave fellow. That it was a shark I knew, and before I had time to realize the full horror of the situation I marked another driving in from the opposite direction. Both brutes had scented prey and both made a dash for it. I shouted at the boat and pointed. The men saw the danger and bent their backs, but it was too late; the two fins suddenly cut the water like lightning and then disappeared; there was an instant of commotion, a blood-curdling yell, a riot of water lashed to froth by the ravenous fishes as they fought for their victim and tore him apart. That was all. The man had evidently been seized by both sharks at once; he disappeared like a flash and in twenty seconds the blue surges were sweeping along untroubled.

I shuddered as I thought of the momentary men-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

tal agony of the poor soul. As the boat's crew reached the deck they fell on their knees and crossed themselves; Miss Violette hurried below as pale as death and the Madame showed her susceptibility by fainting away. It was a terribly gruesome incident, but at sea such things are magnified and assume greater proportions than upon land, and though the man had been but a common sailor, his fate affected the cabin as much as it did the forecastle. For hours nothing else was talked about, though I did not hear Basco express a word of regret—but, for that matter, since we had left Kingston I had rarely heard him speak, and then only to Delano.

We raised the mountains of Venezuela some hours before the coast-line stood clear. The city of Caracas, then the center of much political disturbance, is some six miles inland, its true port being La Guaira, a fever-stricken coast-town set on an open roadstead and connected with the capital by a short railway.

Here we dropped anchor, and as the chain cable roared through the hawse-pipe to me it seemed like a definite voice of adieu. In less than twelve hours I looked to see the last of the *Siesta*.

My plans were only roughly defined. If the schooner passed to the Venezuelan government, Miss Violette Montagna would go ashore and I would sever my relations with the yacht and follow,

THE CRISIS

well content; if the deal was not closed she would remain, and so would I, equally content.

For I had come to be honest—with myself, at least,—and now knew that if I did not absolutely love this girl with my whole strength the plant of affection had grown to be so sturdy that it would be a painful effort to root it up. I did not hope for an alliance—such a thing appeared impossible. I was a ruined man in a subordinate's position; she, wealthy in her own right, though her property was yet in trust in the hands of her guardian. As I was true to myself I am frank in saying that as yet I was satisfied to be in her presence—that I longed to protect her; to think more was merely presumptuous.

And so I looked for this to be the end of the voyage, though had I been able to penetrate the future, God knows I would have faced it for the reward it brought. It was close to sunset when we anchored, and even as we swung into the wind I saw the colors go down from the numerous vessels that lay in the roads, and darkness soon covered the water. Up the side of the black mountain there was a glow that told of the electric lights and the gaiety of Caracas.

That night I got my belongings together, that I might be prepared for an immediate move on the morrow. In doing this I missed the knife I had taken from young Fosse. There was not the least doubt

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

as to where it had gone, but I was not then in a position to raise a row about its loss, and it did not matter a great deal, anyway.

However, I made up my mind that if I met the private secretary ashore I would give him another taste of my quality. Nor was I afraid of the consequences. Venezuela was then mighty friendly with the United States, and our consul was an important factor at the seat of its government.

This was proved sooner than I expected, and in a way wholly unlooked for by me.

During that night no one left the schooner, nor did any visitor come aboard. I knew that Delano and Basco were closeted together until very late, and for some time Fosse was with them. The following morning the captain and the owner went ashore, the former in yachting regalia. The jetty was a full mile or more away, for, as there was no shelter here, we were well out, ready to take a good offing should a northerly gale spring up.

Somewhat to my surprise, there did not appear to be the slightest change aboard; no indications of packing or the uneasiness that precedes a general breaking up. Just before going over the side Delano called me to him.

"Mr. Ransome, I consider it wise to be prepared to move the yacht in a hurry. Yonder lies a Vene-

THE CRISIS

zuelan gunboat, and the Lord only knows in whose hands she is now."

He pointed to a small, schooner-rigged steamer with rather bluff bows and considerable breadth of beam. From forward, frowned the menace of a long brass gun, and she probably mounted a couple of cannon on each broadside.

"There lies the strength of their navy," he said with a laugh. "They have one more vessel, hardly larger than a tug; it is probably up the Orinoco. It is well for you to know that I am on a rather ticklish business; Basco says he told you, but of that later; your hands are free. The health officers may come aboard, but let no one leave this vessel until I get back—not a soul. I leave the rest to your discretion."

He did a strange thing then, for a captain to do to his mate; he held out his hand to me. I knew it was to test my standing toward him and I took it, for it seemed impossible to harbor resentment against him. Nay, even knowing him through and through, as I do now, notwithstanding his enormous fault, for which he paid heavily, I have a warm spot in my heart for that colossal villain.

He went away. It was just after sunrise, and for the first time in many days the wind died flat, leaving the sea a waving mirror in the sun. But mindful of

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the captain's order, I did not set an awning, stopping Turk, who came aft to spread it on his own initiative.

I walked back to the waist with him.

"Bo's'n," said I, "have you noticed anything peculiar going on?"

He looked at me quizzically a moment.

"I don't happen to be blind, yer honor. There's the devil goin' on this minute along the heel of the bowsprit. I can't make out the lingo, but I hears your name now an' then, an' I have a middlin' hold o' their cuss words, what are flyin' thick about it."

"Who is there?"

"Basco's long-legged pen-slinger an' Diaz. They been gammin' for half an hour or more, but seein' it's hot an' we be at anchor, I haven't pushed any jobs."

I felt that I wished to make a confidant of the old man, but hardly knew what to tell him at this juncture. I knew I could depend upon him in whatever situation I found myself, but I only said:

"Turk, there is trouble aft, and more than likely there will be trouble forward. It is best that you appear to have your sympathy for the men—appear, do you understand?"

"I sartain does, Mr. Ray—Ransome."

"That's enough for now. Break up that jawing match any way you please."

THE CRISIS

"Aye, aye, sir," he said, touching his hat.

In less than ten minutes I saw Diaz coming aft with the slush bucket. He climbed to the mainmast head and with the help of a tackle and fall and a boatswain's chair began greasing down the big stick. But he scowled like thunder as he saw me, and in truth Turk had set him at a grilling job.

After breakfast the young lady came up dressed in some cobwebby stuff that made her look like a picture. She seated herself in the cock-pit under the shadow of the big boom, and I joined her at once, glad of the chance to see her alone for a few minutes.

I told her why I had not set the awning, at which her clear young brow took on a troubled look.

"Not a word has my guardian said about the transfer of the schooner; and why we should be in danger from the gunboat I cannot see. There is something back of all this, Mr. Ransome. It is not likely that any force would seize an American yacht from mere suspicion."

"We are in their waters and they have a perfect right to come aboard," I explained.

"And what would they find that's out of the way? Do I look formidable?"

"Mighty formidable to me," I said to myself, but aloud I merely answered:

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"They would find little unless they broke open the lazarette, and there, only a few arms consigned to no one. There is nothing else contraband aboard."

"Then how ridiculous to be so timid! If timidity is justifiable it is from some other cause than fear of insurgents," she said. "I sent your communication to my brother, in a letter."

"By whom?" I asked.

"By Captain Delano. He promised to mail it at Caracas and—"

At that moment there came a hail in Spanish from alongside. I jumped to the rail and saw a small steam launch rolling near our counter.

"Is this the *Siesta*?" asked a young man in a gaudy uniform of scarlet and white, with a sword belted to his thigh.

"Yes, sir," I answered, taking off my cap, at which he did the same.

"Cleared from Matanzas, Cuba?"

"No, sir, from Savannah, Georgia, United States.."

"Are you sure?"

"I am the first officer, sir."

"Is your owner aboard?"

"No, sir. Owner and captain went to Caracas early this morning. Who are you, sir?"

"It matters nothing," he said, dropping into his seat, and without further words he motioned to the

THE CRISIS

sailor in charge of the engine, and the little boat puffed away.

I watched it slide over the smooth water and go toward the gunboat, then put my glass on it. Instead of boarding the war vessel the young officer stood up in the launch and evidently made a report to someone on deck. A moment later the launch sheered off and went toward the jetty.

I might have thought more about this interchange of questions and answers, which was carried on with exceeding politeness save for my lack of courtesy in not asking the officer on board, a thing I had been forbidden to do, but as I put down the glass I saw Fosse coming aft with two men. To my consternation the sailors began to overhaul the falls of the port quarter-boat. I looked forward for Turk, but not seeing him I crossed the cock-pit toward them, saying to Miss Violette as I passed:

"There is going to be trouble now. Bear me witness of it."

I had no occasion to put the first question, for Fosse drew himself up at once.

"I am going to the schooner yonder, *señor*," he said.

"By whose orders?" I asked.

"By my own desire, sir."

"Then you will have to swim for it, Mr. Fosse,"

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

I replied. "Go forward, you two, at once," I addressed the men.

They did not obey, though they shrank back from the davits and looked at the private secretary.

"Mr. Fosse," I continued sternly, "my orders are that no one leaves this schooner until Captain Delano returns. Go forward, I tell you!" This last to the men, who only backed a pace farther and stood irresolute.

Their disobedience was tantamount to incipient mutiny. I did not know how far they were backed by the rest of the crew, but I was quick to see that I had a situation on my hands the hardest that had yet confronted me.

"I am not under your orders, *señor*," said Fosse, as with sudden pallor he put his hand in the breast of his shirt. "Let down that boat, my men. I will protect you."

CHAPTER XI

THE CHASE

ONE of the fellows advanced to the davits, spitting on his hands as he moved. I sprang for him and drove my fist into his face. As he went down, his head fetching against the bulwark with a bang that laid him quiet, the other turned and ran forward. At that moment I saw Turk rise out of the galley hatch.

"Bo's'n!" I shouted as I whipped out my revolver and wheeled on Fosse. I was none too soon, for, with his knife drawn and his teeth bared like those of an angry cat, he sprang toward me. I heard the girl shriek and would have fired at him, but I saw that she was in the direct line, having come from the cock-pit and standing on the deck with clasped hands and blanched cheeks.

I had no more than time to see this when Fosse was upon me. With my left hand I turned aside his descending arm and drove my uncocked weapon in his face. But it might have gone hard with me had not Turk fallen on the madman like a thunderbolt. Whipping the knife from him, he flung it on the deck

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

and passed his brawny arms around the infuriated Cuban.

"Put that fellow in irons," I shouted, "hands and feet, and lock him in his room!"

"I know of no irons aboard, sir," replied Turk. "Hold hard, my beauty," he continued, giving the kicking prisoner a cuff that might have loosened his teeth.

"Down with him to his room, then. I'll teach him to encourage mutiny!"

There was no delay about it; for the second time within a week Turk hustled the private secretary along the deck. So absolute was the fellow's sense of his own importance that I doubt if he fully realized the extent of his crime in inciting mutiny, and consequently his feeling of degradation must have been overpowering as he was carried past the girl, who stood with clasped hands and parted lips, her cheeks crimson from unusual excitement.

I picked up the knife which I at once recognized; and recognized, too, how nearly I had come to justifying another notch on its handle. Then I followed the prisoner as he was thrust down the companion-way. Turk fairly flung him into his room and I locked the door, pocketing the key.

When I went back on deck the burly boatswain was driving the men forward, swearing like a pirate,

THE CHASE

and they fled like sheep before him. Not a word had Diaz said—not a hostile motion had he made, but when I looked at him he was slushing the mast as though nothing had happened to divert his attention from his work.

I had no fear of being censured by Delano, as I had been well within my rights as an officer, and now that the affair was over I was rather glad that I had given the crew an example of my mettle. The man I had knocked down I paid no attention to, thinking he had learned his lesson, and so far as the others were concerned, I saw no more evidence of disaffection than is almost always to be found against those in authority; the forecastle always grumbles.

The day wore on without further incident. Mme. Basco came up, but the heat of the shadeless deck soon drove her below, and through the hot hours the schooner fairly snored at her anchorage. Undoubtedly we looked the picture of lazy peace; a fiddle whined from somewhere forward, and the bells of the surrounding ships chimed in concert. But, nevertheless, the real mystery of the *Sicsta* was fast ripening and nearly ready—unguessed by me—to burst its shell.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the sea breeze began to blow, and it was but a few minutes after I had seen the darkening of the water with the first catspaw

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

that crept over the ocean, that I discovered the *Siesta's* quarter-boat coming along as rapidly as two men could pull it. With my glass I could see both Delano and Basco sitting astern, both constantly looking back.

As they drew near I caught the possible cause of their haste, for there was the steam launch evidently following them, a little white bone under her bow. But she was still far away.

As the boat came within hailing distance, Delano stood up and, making a trumpet of his hands, shouted:

"Up anchor and away-y-y! Up anchor! Up anchor!"

I caught his words plainly enough, distant though he was. It was an order and, though a strange one, admitted of no question or delay.

I passed the word to Turk to get up fore and main-sail, and then ran forward to see to the anchor, that being under the particular care of the first mate. All hands were on the jump and the cable was growing straight ahead. It was more than half in when the boat swept alongside and Delano reached the deck. I ran aft to meet him and saw Basco stagger to the companionway and go below; the glimpse I caught of his face showed him ghastly, but Delano was more

THE CHASE

ruddy and full of fire than I had ever known him to be.

"Basco is ill," he said to me hurriedly; "made ill by those fellows yonder who wish to arrest him."

"Have they a warrant?" I asked in wonder.

"I don't know—but it is not served, and, by Heaven, it sha'n't be served on this vessel! We are under the American flag, Mr. Ransome, and I look to you to help me protect Mr. Basco from a lot of interfering dagoes. It seems that they want the schooner and all on board. The moment the anchor breaks ground make sail. Stand out with the wind on the quarter—it is our best point."

It was no time for explanations, and to refuse to obey orders was something that did not enter my head, so thoroughly is obedience drilled into the sailor—though in a sense it would have been better for me had I mutinied then and there.

By this, both main and foresails had been hoisted, a hand was at the wheel, and the sheets were manned. Every order had been obeyed with despatch, thanks to Turk, who appeared to know my wishes before they were expressed. I can see him now, his long, grey hair dancing on his shoulders, his whistle clinched between his ragged teeth as he lent a hand now here, now there, hurrying one man with an oath and another with a thump.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

And link by link came in the cable. It was just as I gave the cry "Anchor's away!" and ordered the jibs hoisted that the steam launch ran to our side and hooked onto the gangway steps, which had not yet been taken in. The young officer whom I had seen in the morning was on the deck at once; he came face to face with Delano just as I reached the waist.

"In the name of the Republic of Venezuela, I demand the surrender of this vessel and the person of the owner, Juan Basco. You are too late, Captain Delano. The schooner is seized and libelled. Come to at once. Order your sails lowered and your anchor dropped."

He spoke in Spanish.

With this he took a paper from his pocket, and with a polite bow held it toward Delano. I marked a gathering blackness on the captain's face. For a moment he glanced forward and aloft, as though to see the condition of the schooner, then he spoke up sharply:

"Make the course east by north, Mr. Ransome. Get up your gaff canvas. Make all sail."

As he finished speaking he turned to the young officer before him, and, taking a step forward, snatched the paper from him, tore it across and flung the fragments over the rail. Pointing to the flag which had been run to the peak, he thundered:

THE CHASE

"We are under the ensign of the United States, sir, and are not to be interfered with or boarded with impunity. There is your boat. Get from this deck without delay, or I'll throw you overboard!"

The young fellow looked at him in amazement. Then retreating a step, he drew his sword, his eyes flashing. But he did not know the futility of attempting to intimidate Delano. The captain bore down on him like a blast of wrath. Knocking the slender weapon aside, he seized the youth by the throat and, easily lifting his slight figure, threw him clear of the rail and into the sea.

There was a cry as he struck the water and at once the launch left our side to rescue the officer, who came to the surface, minus his sword, and was hauled aboard. He stood for a moment, the water sluicing from him, shaking his fist at Delano, who was now leaning easily on the rail laughing in return as the yacht gathered way. Then the launch steamed off toward the gunboat. For a moment Delano watched it without speaking, then he turned to me, all his mirth disappearing with the suddenness of a snuffed-out candle.

"Mr. Ransome, I am going to have an open talk with you as soon as we clear from this place. You have not been treated fairly. I would have told you all before now had it not been for Mr. Basco."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"And he informed me that you refused to tell me."

"About what?"

"Of the sale of the yacht to Venezuela—its disguise to protect it from seizure by the insurgents. What is the meaning of this I have just seen?"

Delano scowled at my answer.

"Ransome," said he, "you are a man of sense in most things. Did it never occur to you that no government on earth would want a mere sailing vessel to add to her navy, these days? I am sorry to tell you that Basco is both a liar and a coward. See how he sneaked below and left the brunt of this last muss to me. I think he's touched aloft. I'll tell you the whole business before I sleep to-night; then you may damn me and act as you please and I will bear you out. I swear, I believe that you and Turk and the women are the only blind ones aboard. Look! By the god of storms! They are going to chase us!"

He pointed toward the gunboat. Sure enough, the smoke was pouring from her single funnel, showing that she was getting up steam, and as we looked her mainsail began to go aloft.

"Steam or no steam, such an apple-faced relic of the scrap heap will not even touch our wash, if the wind comes with its usual strength," said Delano, shading his eyes with his hands.

As he spoke, there came a spurt of smoke from the

THE CHASE

gunboat's bow and the distant clap of a report sounded clear.

"That's a shout for us to stop," said he; "and now we have the mighty republic of Venezuela barking like a dog at our heels. I don't think we are in great danger from their fleetness or their fire, but, all the same, I wish to Heaven darkness was at hand. Where's Fosse?"

"Locked in his room," I returned, and briefly told the story of the morning. Delano clapped his palm on his broad thigh with a sound like a pistol-shot.

"To the gunboat! He wanted to get to the gunboat! He's the devil that has spilled our milk. More's the pity you didn't kill him! What's the matter with the men forward?"

I turned and looked. The crew were bunched near the galley hatch, and there was a deal of gesticulating and waving of arms toward the war vessel. The men appeared to be all talking at once, until I saw Turk jump into the middle of the group and scatter them right and left.

Then he started quickly toward us, but before he came abaft the mainmast another shot rang out.

"Ha!" exclaimed Delano, his eyes glistening. "Another shot, and there was a ball ahead of that bark. Did you see it?"

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"No," I returned, "but we are yet within easy range."

Although it was true that we were well within range of the Venezuelan gunboat, I very much doubted that she had flung a shot at us. Not because she lacked the will to do it, but because the shipping in the roadstead was so thick that to miss us might endanger some other craft and bring about the ears of the struggling republic a mass of trouble. When we both should have made an offing I felt we would have plenty of iron flying about us, unless we could speedily put ourselves out of range.

What it all meant I knew not, but before I had time to express my opinion of the shot Turk came up and saluted.

"What's the trouble forward, bo's'n?" asked the captain.

"The crew is daffy for bein' shot at, sir," he replied. "They make each other wild with their lingo. They be close to the wind o' mutiny, sir, an' mostly along o' that dago, Diaz."

I expected Delano to fly in a rage, but instead he said very quietly:

"Muster all hands, bo's'n. I'll have a talk with them."

Turk ran forward sounding his whistle. It was

THE CHASE

"All hands aft," and presently the crew was standing in a bunch abaft the mainmast. They looked to be pitifully few in numbers, considering the tonnage of the yacht, though the schooner was easy to work; and pitifully weak as a body of men, nearly all being undersized.

Except for Turk, Diaz, and the carpenter, a fellow called Stophe, I did not see a face which denoted average intelligence, nor until then had I realized what a scrub crew had been picked up for the *Siesta*. The steward was not among them, but, though a negro, he had more wit in his countenance than the whole gang, Turk excepted.

"Men," said Delano, stepping forward, "I understand you fear yonder vessel which seems about to chase us because I flung one of her insulting officers over the rail. Let me tell you that I had a right to do that, and did it for your protection. Had I allowed him to have his way, every man of you would spend this night in the calaboose ashore and never see your next month's wages.

"You are under the flag of the great United States. That protects you if they catch us; but they will not catch us if you do your duty. I wish to say right here that those who remain faithful and obey orders while defending this vessel will receive from *Señor*

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Basco ten dollars in addition to the regular pay—not at the end of the voyage, but at the next port. Has any one anything to say?”

This was plain talk, and though only a lie fit for children, was well calculated to turn the trick, especially in its appeal to the crew's cupidity. There was a shuffling of bare feet and a general look at Diaz. It is probable that he felt his chance had come to prove his leadership by showing his fearlessness, for he at once stepped forward.

“We would be willing to do all that is necessary to work the sheep, but we would like to know what has become of Meester Fosse?”

On the part of the men no exception was taken to this, but Delano's face turned purple from rage. However, the situation was too delicate for an explosion, and he knew it.

“Has it come to an officer being questioned by the crew in a matter of punishment for inciting mutiny?” he thundered. “Mr. Fosse is being well treated; let that suffice you. You who intend to stand by me let them step forward, that I may know the others.”

I looked at Turk and barely moved my head. He promptly advanced, and was at once followed by two men. The others came up slowly, one by one, as though in doubt, and when at last Diaz saw that if he remained behind he would remain alone he, too,

THE CHASE

came forward. I had little faith in this display of loyalty, but it was a momentary triumph for the captain.

"That will do, men," he said. "Go below, the star-board watch."

He had no more than let the words from his mouth than there came a whistling scream, followed by a report, and a missile of some kind plunged into the water ahead, throwing up a fountain of spray. While Turk hustled the men forward Delano peered astern through his glass, then turned to me:

"They have the anchor clear at last and are under way. I don't think they can overhaul us, for the wind is freshening each minute; and I don't believe they can hit us, except through the coldest luck. Do you mark yonder steamer coming up the coast? Put her between us, Mr. Ransome; I am going down to speak with Fosse."

I gave him the key to the private secretary's room and he went below. I was far from sharing Delano's confidence in our ability to escape, and had a well-defined idea that our capture would prove a mighty serious matter for me, innocent though I was. Whatever might be the motive of this attack, I was putting myself in the position of abetting the acts of Captain Delano. It is true that I might then have hove into the wind and surrendered the schooner to the oncoming gunboat, but it would have been an

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

act of the grossest treachery. I could not contemplate it seriously. Better to suffer than to sneak, I thought, especially as Delano has perfect faith in me. His talk of protection by the flag had been the veriest rot, but by going below and leaving me in charge he had done the one thing which, for the present, at least, would hold me to his interests.

I wondered why the shots had not brought up Basco, but of a surety he had not appeared nor were either of the ladies on deck; in all probability the latter were dressing for supper and the distant reports, if heard, would mean nothing to them.

It was with great satisfaction that I noticed the stiffening of the breeze and the darkening of the water to the north. With both steam and sail, the gunboat would soon overhaul us and sink us at short range unless our heels were lightened by wind. In the latter case we had a very fair chance to get away—a chance strengthened by the waning of the day. In less than an hour the sun would set, and I was thankful to know that the young moon at best would give but little light and that it would set early.

But it was this next hour that would determine the future, and I took advantage of each moment. The gunboat had certainly grown and was for the moment outfooting us, though she did not now fire for fear of the incoming vessel, which I brought directly

THE CHASE

in our line of flight. As we approached her I ran as close to windward as I dared, and then eased off the helm until she was exactly between us and the war vessel.

In the meantime I had piled on every rag for which there was an available spar. Before we were fairly on the open sea, with the gunboat at least a mile astern and the land growing blue in the distance, the sun's rim was within half a degree of the horizon.

It was certain now that unless we were winged within the next thirty minutes we would be safe. The gunboat was not built for great speed, as her bluff bows disclosed, and darkness would fall with the rapidity of a theatre-curtain.

But our pursuers, as well as I, were aware of the conditions and they again began firing. We made a fair mark, too, with the sun behind the gunners, and lighting up our immense sails. Her next shell flew at some distance from us, but the second one burst exactly in our wake, and so near that its fragments dotted the water scarce half a cable's length away.

At the sound of the explosion the helmsman jumped and, dropping the wheel, ran forward with a whimpering cry. I uttered an oath as the schooner swung toward the wind, and running to the helm I threw it up. We had lost headway and many fathoms in a few seconds.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

It was then Delano reappeared on deck. I explained the situation, naming the culprit, and the captain strode forward to wreak his vengeance on the coward, while I hung to the wheel with my anxious eye on the drawing sails.

To say I was cool would be untrue, nor was I exactly frightened, but I was decidedly nervous, and wished myself well out of the muss. I was in this frame of mind when Miss Violette came from below like a rising star. She looked astonished when she saw me at the helm, and came toward me.

"You had better remain below," I said rather forcibly.

"Why?" she asked, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

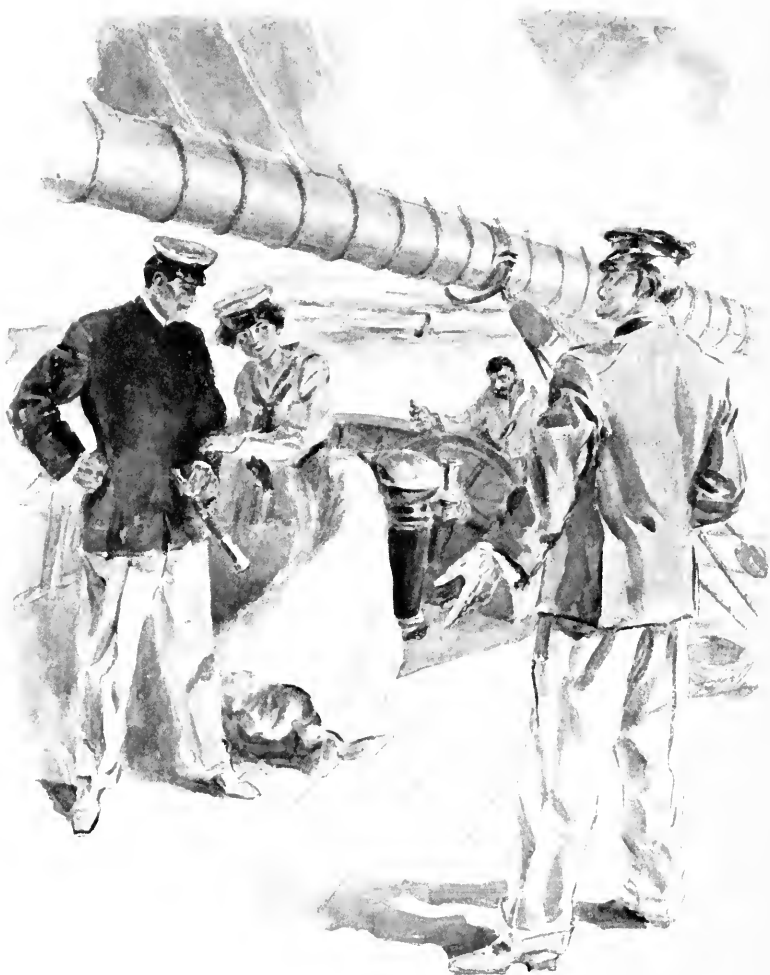
"Because there is danger here. We are being chased and fired at."

As though to accentuate my words another shell went screaming by, and so close to us that involuntarily I shrank from it. It passed ahead and exploded somewhere. The girl did not cry out nor quail.

"I would like to know the meaning of this," she said.

"Ask your guardian, for I can tell you nothing. But for God's sake get below! If anything happens I will let you know."

"Where is the captain?"



— Gust. H. H. —

THE CHASE

"Yonder," I said, nodding forward. Delano was coming aft with his hand on the neck of the skulking helmsman, whom he was kicking at every other step. He fairly flung the fellow against the wheel.

"Stand up to it, ye monkey-face, or I'll make one less coward aboard! Ransome, lend me your revolver a minute, and send Turk aft. Miss Montagna, get below instantly—instantly!"

The girl gave me an appealing look, but obeyed without a word. As I passed my revolver to Delano he turned on the trembling Cuban and thundered:

"If ye run again, I'll drop ye before you've gone three feet, you dog."

As I went for Turk I saw him coming down the forerigging.

"I was aloft to gauge the distance, sir," said he. "I don't think we are quite holding our own. What's this all about, sir?"

"I don't know," I said. "The captain wants you aft."

But it was only to have him stand guard over the wheelman. My revolver was returned to me and Delano went below again. Presently he came up with a revolver in one hand and a rifle in the other and joined me at the rail.

The gunboat was now firing her bow-chaser as fast as she could load, and though some of her shells flew

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

near us, more fell out of sight. Thus far not a splinter of iron had touched us and the sun was just below the edge of the sea. In five minutes we would be safe from the fire.

"There is going to be the devil to pay on board of this vessel," said Delano as he filled the cylinder of his revolver and threw open the magazine of the rifle preparatory to filling that.

"What now?" I asked, eyeing the gunboat, a smother of smoke trailing behind her and smudging the gold of the horizon.

"What now? More than enough. Fosse has escaped from his room, whether with or without help, I can't say, and he is probably forward; if he does what I fear he will there will be hell aboard this schooner. I am going after him before the mischief is completed."

As he finished speaking, I heard the humming shriek of a shell. It burst with a blinding light just off the port quarter and within a few fathoms of the rail. I staggered, and the fellow at the wheel fell flat, but at once got to his feet unhurt and grasped the wheel once more.

But Delano, who was standing facing me, sank down with a groan, the half filled rifle clattering to the deck. He came to his feet again and tried to

THE CHASE

smile, but his face was pale and he placed his hand to his back, reeling slightly.

"God!" he gasped. "I'm hit!"

And then he went down again as limp as a rag.

CHAPTER XII

A FRIEND IN NEED

TURK sprang forward, and together we lifted the captain to his feet. He was perfectly conscious, though he kept his eyes closed.

"Don't let them know I'm struck," he said feebly, "the crew, I mean. It was only a spent fragment. Get me to the cock-pit. I'll be all right presently."

"Are you in pain?" I asked.

"Hardly. Only numb and faint. Get me whisky."

We set him down in the cock-pit and I turned to go below for the steward. The stimulant was brought, and a large drink of it appeared to bring strength to the injured man. He rolled his blue eyes up at me.

"Can't you help us out of this muss, Ransome?" he asked. "They have nearly the range on us. They know the wind we are on and will follow. My God! I think the air is growing lighter!"

Between uncertainty and this last blow to Delano I was fairly sick from nervous tension, but through it all I was conscious that the captain was right. In a

A FRIEND IN NEED

sort of dumb despair I looked over the sea and marked that the dusk and the wind were falling together. As if in contempt of us the gunboat had already set out her side lights and the red and green eyes were like malicious specks in the distance, but it was evident that the enterprise of the Venezuelan government had not extended to furnishing its navy with search lights, which fact proved to be our salvation.

Another shell shrieked by us but went wild. "Are they going to keep this up forever?" I asked myself, feeling I was verging upon panic. Then I noticed that Delano's head had sunk to his chest, while his body leaned to a fall. I eased him down on the cushions.

In a few moments the blackness of night was over us, but another shell hurtled by. It was then that I observed the illumination from the cabin as the light came broad from the open doors, and I saw we were in a fair way to ruin ourselves by our thoughtlessness. With such a target, our pursuers hardly needed the light of day.

At that moment some benign power put into my head the memory of an old trick. During the Civil War it had been used by blockade runners until the deception had worn thin, but it might do for this generation of Spanish Americans.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Put out that lamp," I roared to the steward. "Forward there—are the side lights going?"

"Yes, sir," came back the reply.

"Douse them at once," I shouted. "Some of you lower away the quarter-boat. Turk, go forward and get a clear lantern; make a display of it. Quick, now! I am going to set a false light afloat and haul on the wind. It is our only hope!"

Turk was soon ready. The boat was lowered with the brilliant lantern lashed to a thwart, and I allowed it to tow astern for a few moments. The sheets were manned and I waited for another shot. It came—much too near to suit my strained nerves.

"Down with the helm," I yelled, casting off the boat's painter. "Trim in—trim in. Make it due north, you at the wheel."

The great schooner turned on her heel and poked her nose toward the wind, which seemed to gather force as we drove into it. I looked at the little light already bobbing fathoms away, and wondered if such a crass move could possibly be successful at this late day. A minute or two would show.

At last came the shot and with it relief, temporary, at least, for the fiendish scream of the shell sounded from leeward. A quarter of a mile away, at least, was the flash of its explosion. We had outwitted

A FRIEND IN NEED

them and were safe at the sacrifice of a quarter-boat and a lantern.

For the first time in two hours I drew a long breath, and going to the cock-pit, turned my attention to Delano. He was unconscious, having fainted from either pain or shock, and in the darkness I could make little of him. Turk and I got him down to the cabin, but when I tried the door of his room, I found it fastened and the key gone.

I struck a match and went into the passage to get the little night light from its place over the arms locker. As I approached the mainmast trunk, there came the bang of a slammed door, followed by a hurried shuffling of feet, then all was quiet. Something was in the wind; I felt it in my bones, but had no time to investigate.

I lighted the lantern, and then discovered that the doors of the arms locker were wide open and part of the contents gone. The significance of this brought the perspiration streaming from me. I recalled Delano's words that there was the devil to pay on the *Siesta*, and it did not take me many seconds to see what he meant. With the crew armed we would be at the mercy of its leader.

But Delano demanded my immediate attention.

Up to this time Basco had not appeared, the steward was somewhere forward, and the only man on

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

board on whom I might rely was Dave Turk. But just then I did not take him into my confidence regarding the arms locker, nor tell him of the escape of Fosse. To me the one imperative thing to be done was to get the unconscious commander into his own bed and bring back his senses; his advice was all important to me at present.

With a feeling of *lèse majesté* I went through his pockets, Turk holding him on the cushioned locker, and at length I found his bunch of keys. Lantern in hand I opened his cabin door, but had no more than put my foot over the sill than I was seized by the throat and thrown violently to the floor.

Whoever my assailant was, he had the grip of a giant, and I was taken too absolutely by surprise to defend myself. I know that I suddenly felt lax and that the lantern rolled away from me, though by a fortunate chance it did not become extinguished. A knee was planted on my chest, the weight of the man above me crushing the breath out of my body.

He caught the lantern before its flame fired the leaking oil, and held it close to my face, then, with an exclamation, he jumped to his feet and backed away.

"Good God!" I heard him cry. "It is Jack Raymond!"

I seemed to be waking from a dream then. I still lay on the floor, too shocked and breathless to arise,

but as I stared at the man before me, his face and form grew familiar. The upheld lantern threw its light over the countenance of no less a person than Stetson Delavan.

One might think that such a meeting would have led to a wild display of words, but there was nothing of the sort; the human brain is peculiar and is not lightning-like in its ability to absorb startling facts. However I might have blinked in my surprise, in a moment more I was looking at him as though we had parted less than an hour before, and aside from being somewhat jarred and breathless from the violence of my treatment, I was as cool as though nothing had happened as I slowly got to my feet. I could not comprehend him. His presence here was as meaningless to me as some astounding statement regarding interstellar space.

"How under the canopy did you get here?" I asked, as I might have asked a dream figure, and without holding out my hand.

"How did you come aboard of this pirate?" he demanded in turn, taking me in from head to foot.

"I am the chief officer of the *Siesta*," I returned. "And you?"

"I came aboard at Matanzas from a small boat. I was invited below on the pretense of coming to an understanding and was treacherously made a pris-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

oner by Delano. Where is the sheriff who was in the boat with me?"

He stepped forward, grasping me by the shoulders and peering into my face. He was not violent, but I knew he was in a mood in which he was not to be trifled with. A great light broke on me.

"I knew nothing about it then and know but little more now. I understood that a Mr. Martinez was in the boat. Delano cast it adrift with three men in it. They were in the bay and had but to row ashore. Were you posing as Martinez?"

"Through a mistake of the sheriff's I pass under that name. I represent Martinez & Co. How came you to be an officer of such a craft as this?"

"Why should I not be?" I asked. "There is mystery all about me. Since sailing I am aware there is some deep trouble aboard, but what it is I am unable to state. So far I have acted in good faith. I know we have been chased by a Venezuelan war vessel. I have tricked her, but I confess I don't understand what the thing is all about. Delano promised to tell me the story to-night, but he has been hurt by a bursting shell. It is all like a nightmare to me."

Delavan picked up the lantern and held it close to my face. Then I noticed he had a hand-cuff on each wrist, with pieces of a broken chain dangling from the rings.

"Don't you *know*?" he asked.

"As I am a man, I do not," I replied.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, grasping my hand for the first time and drawing a long breath of relief. "Let me tell you that as our agent—the agent of Martinez & Co.—the owner of this yacht, Juan Basco, has defaulted for over a million of dollars, and I suspect the unspent remnant is on this yacht. I find he has robbed every one, and I believe the bulk of the loot is aboard this vessel."

I stood still and blinked at the man in dumb astonishment.

"That was why I was willing to come aboard," he continued. "That is why I have made no fuss about my detention. I have waited for an opportunity to bring him to justice. I was promised my liberty on arrival at Caracas. When the firing began I got wild, twisted the chain of my handcuffs to a hard link and managed to break it, and made up my mind to have it out with the first person who entered. I looked for Delano, never dreaming of the luck of half throttling you. You have a story to tell?"

"I have, but I can't tell it now. Where have you been kept?"

"In there—when any one came in." He pointed to the chart room. "I agreed to it. I have suffered no real inconvenience save from the handcuffs, since

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Delano would not trust me—and from the fact that for three weeks I have not had my clothes off, though the heat has been terrific. When alone I have had the run of this room.”

“Do you know that Violette—that your sister is on board?”

“Yes—I was told so. It was another reason why I was willing to remain. I have little doubt that her fortune has been swallowed up with the rest. I was sent down by the head of the house after the receipt of a warning letter by one Fosse—Gabriel Fosse—who demanded a reward for informing on his employer. Is he, too, on board?”

“Yes—and he’s a villain!” I exclaimed, the mystery of the past beginning to unfold. “Now, what are you going to do?” I asked.

He held up his wrists.

“Take these things from me and I will go and see Basco.”

“Basco would be easy, doubtless,” I returned, releasing him with the keys I had taken from Delano’s pocket.

His wrists were bruised and bloody from the terrific strain, but it was little wonder the chain had parted, for the man’s arms were like bars of iron.

“However,” I continued, “there are other and more important problems. Basco will keep for a

A FRIEND IN NEED

time, but Fosse will not." And here I gave my friend a brief history of the voyage.

"And now," I concluded, "there is every reason to think that Fosse, having escaped and gone forward, will not submit to being unrewarded. I can see the whole thing, or most of it. Castro had been notified and attempted to catch Basco. Then came the outrage to the officer and the chase followed. Fosse is at the bottom of it. I made him a prisoner; he has escaped from his room and I have reason to think he is fomenting the crew to mutiny—perhaps as a matter of personal vengeance against me, but more likely for the purpose of looting the schooner. I can see many things, in the light of what you have told me. Fosse knows of the money, of course, but he does not know where it is hidden. He can make mutiny and object to the crew. Mark me, he knows there is not a civilized port that will receive us without arrest, but he wants his reward and will attempt to take it. I can now see how Basco lied to me, and that we fled from Kingston because the authorities had been notified of the defalcation by cable. I can see why the *Siesta* has been disguised. I can readily understand that Castro also had been notified and that he attempted to arrest Basco and seize the schooner."

I spoke rapidly as the light dawned on me.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"And what would you advise?" asked Delavan.

"That you keep concealed. I must get Delano in here and let him tell his story while you listen. After that, armed with Delano's confession, for I don't think he will lie now, we will talk to Basco. Forward they mean immediate mischief, I fear; they have but just robbed the arms locker. There is doubtless a mine of treasure in the lazarette—your sister's fortune among the rest. This we must protect. I would keep you to spring on them if it becomes necessary. Do you know anything of a schooner?"

"I know the bow from the stern and I have steered a small sailboat once or twice."

"Then stay hidden; you would be useless on deck. But now that you are here, Stet, I would face the devil himself and win."

He held out his hand to me and we shook in silence. At that moment my recently shaky nerves were as steady as iron; my load had gone, and though the situation was in nowise improved, I felt distinctly buoyant. "I must have supper served as usual," I continued, going to the door. "It won't do to let the women become demoralized or allow the crew to dream we suspect trouble. I will send Violette to you later."

"You think clearly and quickly," he said.

"I am obliged to," I replied.

A FRIEND IN NEED

It was dark in the cabin. I found Turk patiently supporting the wounded man and ordered him to go up and take charge of the deck and on no account to tell of Delano's mishap, for a mishap only I considered it. Turk being gone, I got Delavan to help me and together we lifted the sufferer to his bed. He had become conscious and looked startled when he saw my companion at liberty, but he said nothing. I left the two and had supper served as though nothing had happened, but I allowed no light in the cabin save that of the small lantern, and only then after blocking the windows.

The only one who appeared at the table was Miss Violette. I sent the steward to Basco's room, and he returned with the message that the owner was ill and that his wife wished for nothing.

I looked sharply at the negro. He did not appear disgruntled; he was a handsome fellow, as I have said, picked up in Savannah, and well trained to his duties. I had hopes that I might rely on him if it came to an open break with the crew.

I had never been in higher spirits than at that meal, nor had I ever seen Miss Violette at a lower ebb. She did not lift herself to meet my good humor and her great eyes questioned me, though, for the most part, her lips remained dumb. Finally, I sobered down.

"Are you aware of impending trouble with the

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

crew?" I asked after dismissing the steward. She nodded. "Since Fosse got away," I continued, "probably freed by Diaz, who could easily have sneaked aft, I find that rifles have been taken from the arms locker. I must get the rest of the arms and hide them. Are you willing to help me?"

"What do you wish me to do?" she asked.

"Let me place them in your room. I have something of a plan to circumvent those fellows if they go beyond their duty, but they must not be armed."

"Of course not," she replied with a quickly rising color that showed she had spirit. "Take them to my room. I am only a girl, but I may be able to help you actively."

"You are a very brave girl," I returned, "and your attitude helps me. Do you know that Delano was hurt—by a shell?"

"No!" she exclaimed. "Is he badly injured?"

"I cannot tell. Would you mind going to him?"

"Mr. Raymond—or, rather, Ransome," she corrected with a wan smile—"you may command me in all things and I will obey, but can you tell me what the horror is that hangs over this schooner? We have been chased and fired upon. Mr. Basco is ill. Captain Delano is hurt. Mr. Fosse is making trouble forward, and I have no doubt he is desperate. Now, please, look at this."

A FRIEND IN NEED

She pulled a small note from her belt and handed it to me. It was in Spanish, written in pencil, and read thus:

In the interest of your safety, which is as dear as the writer's life, you are asked to keep from the deck and confine yourself to your own room for the next two or three days. Let no confusion frighten you. You will be safe under the writer's protection. In the interest of all parties concerned, you will keep this communication a secret.

This effusion was unsigned.

"It is a fine sort of a dime novel document," I said as I finished reading it. "Do you know the writing?"

She shook her head.

"Done by Diaz, possibly, at the dictation of Fosse, who would pose as Lord Protector in your behalf."

Her lip curled, but otherwise she took no notice of my remark.

"But it is all true," I went on. "The advice is good and I would follow it. To remain under lock and key would make you safer than being on deck, and that knowledge would tend to make my mind easier. There is one thing positive," I added, conscious that my voice was growing deep with emotion, "and that is—I will sacrifice my life before I permit harm to come to you."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

She looked up and there was a fine color in her cheeks now.

"It appears, then, that I have two champions and am in but little danger."

"You have three, did you but know it. Now will you oblige me by going to the captain?"

"Yes, but I shall not lock myself up like a frightened child. You might need me."

"Oh, I do—I do," I said to myself, repeating her words. Aloud I asked:

"How did you get that note?"

"It was thrust under my door."

"Ah! The work of the arms thief. I see. Now for the captain, but first I would prepare you for a shock. Some one came aboard as we were leaving Matanzas—came from a boat. Did you know it?"

"No."

"He is with Delano. Go and see who it is."

Her face suddenly flamed and then grew so white that I thought she was about to faint. I sprang up and supported her to the captain's door and knocked. As it was opened, I urged her in and closed it after her. Then I heard a great cry, followed by wild sobbing, on which I knew what had happened, and so turned my attention to other matters.

I first went to the arms locker. Every rifle and re-

A FRIEND IN NEED

volver had been removed, probably while I was at the table talking about them, but from the ammunition drawer nothing was missing.

I was decidedly shaken as I went on deck. It was pitch dark and the wind had fallen to a gentle breeze, and we could not have been making over three knots an hour. Beyond the fact that we must be somewhere off Point Maspan, on the South American coast, I had no notion of our whereabouts. Not a light was in sight save for the stars directly in the zenith, and they seemed to be shining from behind a fine-drawn veil. This alone indicated a coming change of weather, the failing of the wind making the outcome more ominous.

I found Turk and briefly told him what had happened, because without the faithful fellow understanding the situation he would have been at sea in more senses than one. I could hardly make out his face as I recounted what I had learned, but his low curses and muffled exclamations were eloquent.

"Do ye think, sir," he asked, after I had finished, "do ye think I had better go for Fosse an' snake him aft?"

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir, but I stand fair with them—I have done my share o' damning ye. I fancy I could get at him an' drag him out."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Aye—and it would bring affairs to a head at once, and I am not yet ready. If the captain is disabled in the morning I shall muster all hands and choose you for mate; they know I must have a mate. You will stand watch and watch with me."

"An' ye won't mind if I talks stiff to ye before the han's?"

"Not in the least. I will understand."

"Very good, sir. If words tell, they won't doubt me. Shall I stand this watch?"

I had no chance to answer him, for at that moment I saw the white dress of Violette as she came up from below. I was at her side in an instant.

"Captain Delano wishes to see you at once," she said. "Mr. Ransome, do you know, I believe he is dying."

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEATH OF DELANO

A FEW minutes later I was seated at the captain's bedside. The girl had locked herself in her room, by her brother's advice, and Delavan was stationed near the door through which I had just entered. I had previously locked my own door and ordered the steward to fasten the door of the passage that led forward. I had no fear of an immediate outbreak, but I wished no prowlers aft.

As for the injured man, even by the light of the little lantern, which had been seized to the large lamp, I saw that the girl had been right in her fear. If ever death was stamped on a human face, it was stamped broad and deep on Delano's. His changed appearance shocked me, but I did not give vent to any feeling. He reached out his hand and gave mine a feeble squeeze.

"Look me over, John," he said, with a familiarity, which was as startling as it was unusual. I examined him, bringing to bear my slight knowledge of wounds.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Over his left kidney was a spot the size of my two palms which was already as black as tar and so painful that he groaned at my slightest touch. Poorly equipped as I was I knew that a blow which would produce such conditions was one that had probably ruptured the organ over which it fell, and I more than suspected internal hemorrhage. That he was suffering from shock was plain enough, while the pinched and ashy look of his face told me he was not long for this world. He gazed at me fixedly when I had finished my examination.

“You find too much?”

I simply nodded.

“Aye, I feared so,” he said quietly. “I felt it. I am finished—undone, and through my own fault. Give me whisky—I wish to talk.”

I gave him a generous dose of the stimulant, after which his breathing grew deeper. He reached for my hand, and got a hold on it which he kept.

“My lad,” he began, “I know not how to commence. I have not been a bad man as men go, until this trip—not worse than most. I—I have to beg your pardon for getting you into this scrape. How did you escape the gun-boat?”

I told him in a few words.

“I am glad—for your sake,” he said. “It might have gone hard with you had they overhauled us,

THE DEATH OF DELANO

and, as God is my witness, I meant no harm to come to you. I liked you from the first—and you saved my life, and—and I might have loved you as a son had not my cursed luck swamped me long before my time. That is why I told you nothing and tried to save you from all guilty knowledge.”

He waved his hand toward Delavan, who could hear every word.

“He will tell you what this schooner is—what Basco is. I will save my breath for other things. Fosse—the secretary—is responsible for the fiasco. He knew what Basco was doing and wanted him captured that he might be rewarded. He sent his brother to me in Havana to bribe me to delay sailing that there might be time for Basco to be caught.

“But I was true to Basco, who is such a weak coward. Young Fosse could not move me by words. He tried the other thing. You know—you saved me. The following day he weakened and confessed all. You know most of the rest.”

“I think I know all the rest,” I said, as he hesitated. “How much is there in the lazarette?”

“One million two hundred thousand dollars—all in gold and precious stones and bills. No securities—nothing that was not cash or could not be turned into cash at once. Ah! turn me over!”

I shifted him, and he appeared easier.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Is Miss Montagna's fortune among the rest?" I asked.

"Yes, every dollar of it. Basco realized on all her real estate and bonds, and turned the proceeds into jewels. But he kept these separate; the bags are marked."

"How?"

"Under the canvas coverings—a red cross on the bags—Fosse knows them. Basco has been crooked for more than two years. He has sold real estate to which he held no title. He has perjured himself and committed forgery on the deeds. I know now. He was intimate with your partner."

"What? With Rafael Ravena?"

"Aye, with Rafael Ravena. It may be you have been mulcted; the books should show. Basco promised me fifty thousand dollars if I would get him away. He had gone too far, and had to confide in some one. His idea was to offer a fortune to Castro, become an officer in the Venezuelan army, and defy extradition. I would have gone to England, and—but that is all a dream now.

"He found Castro of a different stripe. We had a close call at Caracas, but got to our boat, and I had gone so far in the matter that the whole pace was all that was left for me."

"And at Kingston?"

THE DEATH OF DELANO

"Aye. You know we had disguised the vessel; it was from fear of some cruiser. Our rig and our color saved us at Kingston. The authorities were on the watch. You know we fled."

"Yes," I said. "That is why you snatched the paper from me; the account was in it." He nodded and closed his eyes for a few minutes, then spoke again:

"But it was not this last blow that determined me to tell you. I promised you. I could not let you share our crime. I was going to free you when I could do so. I did not do right, lad, and ask you to forgive a dying man. Now, what will you do?"

I am glad he did not insist on forgiveness then, though, even in the face of his confession, I felt myself incapable of bitterness toward him. I answered his question.

"I am going to tell Basco that I shall run this schooner to the nearest United States port and give her up to the proper authorities. It is the only way."

He nodded feebly.

"It is the only way—if the stores hold out—but you have not two days of fresh water." He attempted to raise himself, and his voice became more intense. "Lad, beware of Fosse. His plans have come to nothing. I fear he will make trouble—to you—not to

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

me. I will soon be beyond him and all—the world. I'm glad it's off my mind. Curse that shell!"

He loosed his grip on my hand. I gave him more stimulant, after which he settled back and closed his eyes, his breath coming short. As he evinced no more desire to talk—if, indeed, he was able to utter a word—I stole away from him.

"I am going to see Basco at once," I said to Stetson, who had been sitting like a statue. "Perhaps you had better come with me."

He acquiesced with a nod, and we felt our way through the dark cabin to the owner's room. I knocked.

To my astonishment, the door was opened by Basco himself, but he presented a strange sight, being clad in a brilliant dressing gown, which made his haggard face look hideous. He had aged in a few hours, and his slight form was bent, like one in decrepitude. He did not open the door wide, but now I felt myself the master of this trickster, and forced my way past him, closely followed by Delavan.

"I wish to speak to you, *Señor Basco*," I began abruptly.

"What about?" he asked smoothly, settling his glasses on his nose and looking at my companion. "Who is he?"

THE DEATH OF DELANO

"This gentleman came aboard at Matanzas. That you have not met him before is not my fault."

"Ah!" was his reply as he passed his jeweled fingers through his tangled hair. "I presume this act—his being on board here—is due to Captain Delano."

"Your presumption is right, *señor*," I returned. "However, it is not necessary to criticize Captain Delano. We have come for the purpose of planning for the future. You know we have been chased?"

"But not overtaken. Yes." He bowed and a slight flush passed over his face.

"There is little to be gained by beating about the bush, *señor*," I continued; "and deception has met its legitimate end. I wish to tell you very plainly that you have overreached yourself. At last, I know the value of your story to me. I know what has happened; what this yacht holds in its lazarette, and what your relations are to the whole."

We had all been seated, but as I reached this point Basco jumped up.

"I will not permit this from an employee of mine," he vociferated, all the oiliness gone from his voice. "Where is Captain Delano? I wish to speak to him. *Señor* Ransome, leave the room, and send him to me."

To tell the honest truth, I was mean enough to

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

enjoy the situation, and I have no doubt my confidence had an air of impudence as I answered without moving from my seat:

"You will find Captain Delano in his bed, *Señor* Basco. He was struck by the spent fragment of a shell from the gunboat. He has confessed everything. He is dying, *señor*."

The man's face turned suddenly livid and he stood quite still, his eyes fixed on mine. I drove the nail home then.

"And this gentleman, *señor*, is Mr. Stetson Delavan, the brother of your ward, Violette Montagna, and a junior partner in the house of Martinez & Co., of New York. Undoubtedly, you know them, though you have never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Delavan before. His being here is due to your private secretary, Gabriel Fosse, who has deceived you more successfully than you deceived me. I believe that is all, *Señor* Basco."

It was an unholy revenge. The man dropped into his chair as though too weak to stand, his olive skin turning green. For a space we three sat silent. Basco finally reached for the decanter that stood on the table at his elbow, and poured for himself a glass of its contents, his hand shaking so that the liquor spilled on the gorgeous cloth.

"And what do you propose doing now?" he faltered.

Before I could answer Delavan intervened. His voice was sharp and his words decisive.

"We are going to take this vessel back to the port from which she cleared, sir, and there deliver it and you to the authorities. Whether you will be tried in the United States or in Cuba, the law will decide. In the meantime, sir, I shall find a set of irons and place them on you unless you will engage not to leave this room for the rest of the voyage. I will have your answer at once."

Here it was that the cowardice and weakness of the man were manifested. I shall not go into the details of his wild pleading for mercy; his abject cringing before Delavan, on whom all his attention was now centered. He even went so far as to go on his knees to my companion, an action which, coupled with his brilliant dressing gown and his previous pride, made him, in my eyes, at once ludicrous and detestable.

He begged for liberty for himself—everything was for himself. Would we put him on a desert island—would we do anything rather than take him to the United States? He offered to sell all his landed property not already disposed of, and make such restitution as he could. He even attempted to bribe us. The tears streamed down his face, and altogether he

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

presented a detestable figure of a man. Delavan was so disgusted he almost spurned him with his foot. But in the end all that he obtained was freedom from irons, and that only when he had taken a dozen oaths not to leave his room without permission.

"There is little to fear from Basco," said my friend as we left. "He is a human jelly-fish. How such a character could have the nerve to attempt such wholesale embezzlement, I can't comprehend. I fancy that in the end the firm will lose but little; my sister will lose nothing if her fortune is aboard, and I will see that you are taken care of. It looks like plain sailing."

"Aye, save for Fosse," I said. "We will yet hear from him and the crew never fear. As they have cleaned out the arms locker we must get some from the lazarette to-morrow; then we can act. But now for Delano."

We returned to the captain's cabin. The dying man was lying as I had left him, and now he appeared incapable of speaking. He opened his mouth, but as no sound came from it, I thought he wanted water, and gave him some, which he took eagerly. Then he lay back, looking at me, his eyes hardly wandering. But that he was in pain was evident, though I knew not how to relieve him until I thought of mor-

THE DEATH OF DELANO

phine. I found the medicine chest (a most elaborate affair), and finally discovered what I needed.

But Delano never received physical relief at my hands. As I approached the bed with the vial of pellets, he opened his eyes very wide, as though he had suddenly seen an apparition, then struggled to raise himself.

"God!" he shouted, and fell back. He was dead when I bent over him.

CHAPTER XIV

A TRAGEDY

I **FELT** that I had undergone enough for one day. What with being chased and fired at; finding an old friend like one dropped from the skies; being half stunned by the state of the captain, and his subsequent confession; having an interview with Basco, in which there was much that was dramatic, and finally witnessing the death of Delano, I was sufficiently used up; and yet I had to go on deck at midnight.

I went to my room and lay down for an hour, taking Delavan with me. It was then five bells, or half past ten, and everything was as quiet as though nothing out of the common had occurred.

At eight bells I went up and found the night calm. Nothing had happened to disturb the watch. I confess I felt nervous about taking the deck alone at a time when an enemy might take advantage of the darkness, but without my saying a word Delavan had insisted on going up with me.

The helmsman loomed taller than he was as he

A TRAGEDY

stood in the soft light from the binnacle, but there was nothing for him to do. The wind had died flat; the schooner was without an inch of way and lay rolling on a long, low, and sluggish swell, the slatting of her sails, the switching of blocks, the kick of her rudder, and the patter of her reefing points making a rather stormy overture on the still air. Aloft, the stars had gone out, and so dark was the night that my eye could not follow the white canvas more than half-way to the peak.

As I went through the cabin I looked at the barometer. It had fallen, but not far, and though every sign pointed to the coming of foul weather I did not look upon it as imminent.

I found Turk by the glow from his pipe, and when I told him of the death of Captain Delano and the charge against Basco, he was well-nigh stunned. But while he thought my plan of running homeward was wise, he did not encourage me with the hope of success.

"If I have the right use o' my ears an' eyes, sir," he said, "I take it the crew—which is the same as sayin' Fosse—will never let ye go north if they know it. They be an ugly lot, and as soon as they find the captain has got his discharge they'll show ye another p'int o' the compass.

"Basco, sir? I don't think they care for him, but

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

they do for Fosse, an' from him they are like to know what is aboard this schooner. I've been felt of in this matter by Diaz, but his touch is light. I let him think I was cock-billed along o' the fact o' bein' chased by a gov'ment boat, an' was hangin' fire about how to act.

"That was not two hours ago, but my opinion, if you want it, sir, is that both ends o' this hooker will have to get together and fight the weather afore another sunset, or I'm a cow; with no disrespect to you, sir."

"Let the weather come," I said. "It will be a relief from this cursed strain. I wish you to get canvas and stitch up the captain's body. You had better report his death to the watch now on deck, and then take a hand to help you. Here is the key."

He went forward, and the darkness swallowed him. An hour passed and I began to feel more settled in nerves, having little to fear of assault, though I kept my eyes wide open. Once in a while the great sails swung with violence, sending from their bunts a slap that sounded like the report of a cannon, while the blocks jerked as though they would part the sheets. I was about to lower the sails to stop the threshing when Turk appeared from below.

"He's all snug, Mr. Ransome, an' weighted, ready

A TRAGEDY

for the last toss. Did any one drop a couple o' blocks on deck, sir?"

"No," I said, wondering what he meant, "but the blocks are jerking hard in the swell."

"'Twan't no jerkin' blocks I heard, sir. If 'twan't blocks or somethin' on deck it was pistol-shots below in the owner's cabin."

"What!" I exclaimed so loud that it brought Delavan to me. Turk tried to see the newcomer, and I explained who he was.

"Yes, sir," he continued. "It was just after I see Basco, himself."

It was Delavan's turn to exclaim.

"Was he out of his room?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. He came in when we was at work on the body. He nearly throwed a fit, sir, not knowin' the captain was gone, an' finally he wanted to go over the corpse for keys to the safe. I told him I didn't know o' no safe an' that ye had the keys.

"He kinder staggered out an' 'twan't half an hour when I heard them sounds. I thought it was somethin' on deck, first, but then I thought it might be somethin' worse, an' so tell ye, sir."

Delavan clapped his hands together.

"For a thousand dollars—he's killed himself. This is horrible! Come down with me, Jack, my nerves are getting unstrung."

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

And circumstances had played upon my own nerves until they were in danger of becoming frayed, for, as he spoke, I felt the hair creep under my cap, a chill swept up and down my spine and the gooseflesh rose all over me. But I could not allow nervousness to overcome me. My duty was plain and together Delavan and I went down into the cabin. I knocked several times on Basco's door, with only the effect of bringing Miss Violette to her's, which she opened on a crack and demanded to know the trouble.

"There is none," said her brother. "Go back to bed and lock yourself in."

"We have got to break through," said the big man, and without more ado he sent his shoulder against the panels and brought his weight to bear. Presently, with a splintering crash, the door flew inward. The room was dark, but a light showed under the door of the communicating apartment.

I ran back for the lantern and we looked around the room. Nothing was out of place there, so we knocked at the second door, and on receiving no response Delavan tried the knob. The door opened easily.

The big bronze lamp was burning and swinging in its slings, its brilliancy bringing out the blue haze of powder smoke that hung on the still air. It also brought out the elegance of the beautiful room,

A TRAGEDY

though the sumptuous surroundings seemed but a mockery when I caught sight of the figure of Basco stretched on the broad divan, under the open port.

The very air of the place spoke of tragedy. The man was dead, and had come to his end instantly, as the black hole in his right temple showed. A large ivory handled revolver, exquisitely chased, was still in his right hand, and his left had clutched the skirts of his elaborate robe.

I was bending over him when Delavan touched me on the shoulder and pointed to the bed. I looked, and there lay Madame, a mountain of gross flesh under the figured silk coverlid. At first I thought she was sleeping, but in a moment my eye caught a dark stain on her white pillow, and I knew she had been murdered. Her heavy face was in its normal and characterless repose, but the usual coarse red no longer dyed her cheeks; death had given her a saffron hue.

It was shocking, but the whole matter was plain enough. Driven into a corner from which it had become impossible to extricate himself, and being too weak and too cowardly to submit to the result of the failure of his dishonest undertaking, Basco had chosen the shortest and easiest cut to freedom. Was it due to conscience, or only fear? I will not judge. The single spark of humanity he had shown—and

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

that, a mistaken one—was to save his wife from disgrace and poverty by sending her before him.

The sight was gruesome, but the details were not horrible; there were no signs of a struggle, no great effusion of blood; nevertheless, the tragedy seemed to shout at me, and the Angel of Death appeared to be a personality that was present though unseen. Neither Delavan nor I spoke a word, but by a feeling common to both we backed from the room as though loath to have these things behind us. We closed the doors and faced each other in the cabin, my friend's countenance white and mine—Heaven knows how I looked, but if my feelings showed I must have been a sight.

“Considering this matter in cold blood,” said Delavan, drawing a deep breath, “he has done well for himself, and even for her. I would not let it be known until daylight. The crew must be told, but it would be too demoralizing to spring the news on them in the dark. I will break it to my sister.”

I nodded, glad that the last task was not for me. He knocked at Violette's door and told her he wished to see her, and I went on deck. Turk received the news without a trace of surprise, and I sent him forward to turn in. When the old man came to relieve me at four o'clock I sent him back to his berth, as I knew I could not sleep.

A TRAGEDY

At daylight the watch began washing down the deck, and by the way they ran their heads together at every opportunity I was aware that they had learned of Delano's death.

There was not a breath of wind and even the swell had diminished; the world appeared to be stagnant; the sky had become leaden-hued; I felt leaden, myself. Fagged as I was, the world was gray.

At eight bells I ordered all hands aft, but it was fully ten minutes before they assembled. Their independent spirit already showed in this want of alacrity, but I pretended not to notice the delay. Without the steward, who was setting the cabin table, there were nine souls before me, the wheel being unmanned in the calm.

I knew that hidden forward was a tenth, who in reality had more power than I. What promises Fosse had made I could only guess, but I knew that Diaz was his lieutenant and that the two were aware of the treasure on board. The *ci-devant* second mate stood in the rear of the group with Turk.

I rapped on the rail and stepped forward.

"Men," I said, "I have to tell you of the sudden death of Captain Delano, who was struck by a bit of shell from the gunboat. That is sad enough, but I have worse news. It is harder to tell, but I will be short and plain with you.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"After the death of Captain Delano the owner of this yacht, *Señor* Basco, was so shocked that he became violently insane—lost his mind entirely, you know—and shot himself in the head after shooting and killing his wife."

Every man started, and several made the sign of the cross. I saw Diaz turn as if to go forward, but he suddenly stopped, crossed himself, and remained. I paid no attention to him.

"Therefore," I continued, "so far as this voyage is concerned our outward course has ended. As the present commander, I shall sail this schooner north to her proper port. But I cannot do it alone.

"I am aware of a discontent among you—due to what, Heaven alone knows—but you will find me easy in stays if you obey orders. I depend upon each one of you to help me, and from among you I shall choose a mate, for a mate I must have. The next in rank is the boatswain. He and I will stand watch and watch.

"Let me tell you that you will lose nothing in wages, and that extra pay will be given to each one who does his duty. That is all. We will bury the dead this evening at sunset. Bo's'n, I wish you to attend to them. Now, if any one has anything to say I am ready to listen."

A TRAGEDY

I looked to Diaz to speak first, but it was Turk who answered:

"Ye talks o' me like I hadn't anything to say about it," he said, drawing his magnificent figure to its full height and shouting insolently, his huge voice sounding like a hurricane. "I ships as bo's'n aboard this craft—an' I wish to Heaven I never set foot on her! I'll stitch up the dead, that bein' in my line, but I tell ye flat I won't accept bein' no actin' officer until I talks it over with my mates."

I scowled at him, at the same time biting my lips to keep from smiling. He was acting well, and not overacting.

"Go and talk it over, then, and let me know in ten minutes."

"I'll let ye know in an hour, perhaps," he returned defiantly; at which some of the men laughed, but the majority were too stricken by the presence of death aboard to show much mirth—for the Spanish-blooded sailor reaches the acme of superstition in this world.

I turned on my heel and walked the deck while the hands shuffled forward in their bare feet, most of them going down the forecastle hatch, probably to consult with Fosse.

Why did I not go forward and capture the secretary? I had the nerve, but what good would it have done? Had I known the exact attitude of the crew

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

I might have acted on the impulse; but their intentions had not yet been revealed, and I did not care to risk precipitating war when I had so much to lose.

There was the young lady in the cabin and a fortune under it. The former must be protected at all hazards, and I considered a waiting policy the best.

Herein I own I made a mistake.

In something less than an hour I saw the men rising out of the forward hatch. They gathered in a body and came aft, and my surprise and indignation may be imagined when I marked Fosse among them. It was evident that he had guarded against being rushed, for he stood in the midst of the group, his head high and his teeth showing in a nasty smile of triumph or malevolence.

His expression was sinister enough, but the threat of his presence was increased as I noticed that he held in his hand the revolver that had been dropped on deck when Delano fell, and that Diaz carried the rifle lost at the same time. The stolen ones were not in evidence, probably from lack of ammunition.

Here was a go. I had allowed myself to be trapped. Delavan was below and probably asleep, and Turk dared not show his hand openly. But though trapped after a fashion, I considered this truculent display as a defense of Fosse rather than an immediate threat to me.

A TRAGEDY

I was soon to be enlightened. As though the act had been rehearsed, the group opened in a theatrical fashion, and Fosse stepped half a pace forward. It was highly dramatic; but he was always dramatic. He looked around at his henchmen, and then he spoke.

CHAPTER XV

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

THERE was an easy insolence in the man even before he opened his mouth, but his case did not blind me to the fact that he was alert enough.

"*Señor*," he began in Spanish, his abrupt speech belying his manner, "we are not to waste much time on you. I hear you have said you are commander of this schooner, but now that *Señor* Basco is dead, who is as near him as his secretary? Therefore I command here. I cannot sail a ship, but I will appoint *Señor* Diaz to do that work—him whose office you usurped.

"I once told you we would balance our books later. The time has come. I owe you much. By you I have been outraged, and yet I spare you, *señor*. Perhaps we may even come to terms and be good friends. You would ask me my right to speak thus? Behold it!"

He turned and waved his hand toward the men.

"Each of you who choose me to command you raise your hand."

Every hand went up, including Turk's, who, I was



B. + H. 1911

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

aware, had not understood a word of what had been said; he simply had the wit to go with the majority.

"You are alone, *señor*," continued Fosse. "It is useless to contest. And you are also armed. That must not be. Deliver your revolver."

Here he switched into English and turned to Turk.

"Go and take his pistol. If he resists I will kill him. Put up your hands, *señor*."

He took a step toward me and raised his weapon, and seeing the uselessness of resistance, I threw my hands above my head. The old man drew out my revolver, which he promptly put in his own pocket. His face was as black as thunder, and when he had disarmed me he shook his big fist under my nose and let slip a volley of picturesque profanity.

Though I fully understood the good will of the boatswain and admired his powers as an actor, I was fairly stunned at this sudden turn of the tables and I cursed my own stupidity for not having provided against such a situation. I was now utterly powerless, and the thing I expected was the immediate looting of the lazarette and the discovery of Delavan. But although the crew had the mastery of me, it was plain that they were held by a strong hand, for they stood quietly enough, seemingly awaiting the pleasure of their leader.

"Now, *señor*," said Fosse, pocketing his revolver

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

and speaking briskly, "the vessel is not going north, as you designed—but of that later. I have much to say to you and will see you presently in your cabin. We have a proposition to make, and when it is made I fancy you will desire to navigate the yacht to the point we have decided upon."

By the time he had finished speaking I had in a measure pulled myself together and had done some tall thinking. Disarmed as I was, I would bring disaster upon the girl, her brother, and myself by opposing this villain in his least wish. I would take advantage of whatever opening offered; but I then saw little possibility for the use of either force or deceit in our behalf.

I knew without being told that the purpose of this band of villains was to get the schooner into some spot where interruption was unlikely and there loot and wreck the vessel. This being accomplished, that my own exit would be next in order—and tragic I felt well assured; but in the meantime much might happen for us, which would certainly happen against us if I ran counter to the self-confessed thief who now had me in his power.

The whole aspect of the situation and its possible consequences drove at a gallop through my brain, while the very enormity of the danger steadied me. I turned to Fosse as I might have turned to a friend

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

with whom I had a slight misunderstanding, and brought into play all my powers to act a part.

"I see no reason why I should object to your proposition in any way, *señor*," I replied as easily as my indignation would permit. "As for any personal difficulty between us, you will admit that all I did was done under orders. Therefore, I am unable to apologize for the past.

"As for sailing to some distant port, it might be feasible, but allow me to point out the fact that we are not provisioned for a long voyage and that the fresh water is practically gone. We intended to get a supply at La Guaira, but you know events prevented. Let me also draw you attention to the threat of the weather.

"That is all, *señor*. I am but the mate of this vessel, and what I have said and done was said and done for the interest of all. I am now going to breakfast."

"A good thought," he returned, with false cordiality. "I will breakfast with you, after which we will come to terms."

He followed me below, and I was aware his move was less for the desire of my company than in order to keep me under his eye.

To my astonishment Miss Violette sat at the table, her face drawn and white, as if from sleeplessness. As she saw me coming down with Fosse her eyes showed

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

her wonder, though her great good sense kept her from any other mark of surprise.

She was cool enough to both of us, but I soon let her into the situation by speaking boldly of the secretary's plans as though they were both legitimate and natural. This was the only way in which I could communicate with her brother, and it had become imperative that he should know the trend of events. I ate slowly and spoke easily; but at length, having said much and inferred more, I left the table for the double purpose of not increasing Fosse's jealousy and of getting to my own room by way of the deck.

Diaz was by the wheel. I told him he might go below and I would reef down while he was getting his breakfast. It was hard to speak decently to him, but I made the concession only to have him tell me very shortly that he would give the necessary orders himself, and thereupon he directed Turk to close-reef all canvas. I was glad he had sense enough to realize that something was coming, but having delivered his order he left me and went down the companionway.

Now was my chance. Much as I desired a few moments' conversation with the boatswain I dared not make any attempt to speak to him, and as soon as Diaz was out of sight I walked easily toward the booby-hatch and went down slowly until my head was below the deck.

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

Then I became animated. Jumping into my room I softly closed the door, took the captain's keys from my pocket, hid them under the mattress of my bed and, taking the dirk I had captured once from Fosse and once from his brother, I strapped it to my leg beneath my trousers. Though I had no way of getting another revolver short of the lazarette, I was now not entirely unarmed.

Then I whipped off my shoes and stole along the passage to Violette's room, hearing the voices of the girl and the secretary as they sat talking at the table. I felt that failure or success lay within the next few minutes. It looked to be flat failure at first, for on trying the door I found it locked. However, I soon discovered the key was on the outside and, turning it with care, entered.

Delavan lay on a locker sound asleep in the after room, with some dishes by his side on the floor—probably food had been smuggled to him by his sister. I laid my hand on his shoulder and he leaped to his feet. He was about to speak, but I hushed him by placing my hand over his mouth.

"The tables are turned on us," I whispered. "I have but a minute to spare. Are you armed?"

"No," he returned with quick comprehension.

"Get to my cabin at once—without noise—at once. Hide behind the curtains of the wash-stand. I am to

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

meet Fosse there and get at the bottom of the matter. He's at breakfast now; perhaps we can catch him at a disadvantage. Violette will tell you more."

Delavan stared at me in wonder, but not daring to lose a minute for fear of being discovered below, I crept from the room, slipped into my shoes and regained the deck.

The menace of the storm had sunk to nothing beside the growing danger aboard the *Siesta*, but now, despite the tension of my nerves, I could not fail to become alive to the sinister aspect of nature.

There was nothing inspiring to the sight in the way of lurid coloring or piled up vapors; it was as though the globe lay crouched and waiting for something to happen. There was no more horizon, for the sea and sky merged together without a break by line or tint, while the grayness of the world was the grayness of death. The flat and colorless water reflected a flat and colorless sky. The ocean breathed and that was all of movement that existed, and the swell was so long-drawn and low that nature appeared to be at its last gasp.

I leaned against the shear-pole of the main rigging and tried to penetrate the veil. The silence was intense, the rudder no longer kicked, the blocks no longer jerked. The sails were being double-reefed, but it was done without noise—or else the peculiar

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

character of the air muffled all sound. Not a voice could I hear, and if the men talked—as well they might after the morning's work—no indication of it came to my ears.

That some convulsion was close upon us I had no doubt. The intense calm, the silence, the inertness of everything were mightily portentous.

I walked to the binnacle. The schooner was headed due south and I looked for wind from the west. Had I the ordering of matters I should have stripped the schooner of every rag and been prepared to run under bare poles as long as possible. If Diaz was not wide awake, there was danger of the schooner piling up on one of the numerous small *cays*, or islands, that fringe the great chain of the Lesser Antilles. I was thinking of this danger when Fosse appeared.

He beckoned me to him where he stood, like one in authority, as indeed he was, and it set my blood boiling, though I concealed my wrath as I went toward him.

“Now, *señor*,” he said, evidently in the greatest good humor with himself, “we will have our little interview.”

But that he was afraid to trust himself alone with me was certain, for he called a hand to him and whispered a few words in his ear. We went below,

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the sailor following. The cabin was empty. I was mightily afraid he would lead me to his own room, but he politely lifted the curtain of the passage for me and I went on to mine, he and the sailor trailing behind.

I would have given much to know whether Delavan was or was not hidden in the room, but there was nothing to inform me. The curtains by the washstand were half drawn and hung motionless save for an almost imperceptible sway due to the slight swing of the vessel.

As if to provide against possible surprise, Fosse threw the door wide open, stationed the man close by, and pulling out his revolver, sat himself down facing the curtains. He motioned me to a chair and I took the one nearest him, at which he politely requested me to move across the room. I obeyed with as much grace as I could command.

"Now, *señor*," he began, crossing his long, thin legs and showing his fine teeth in a hard and mirthless smile, "you and I will come to terms. I have no love for you, but you are in the way of being useful and I am willing to pay for your usefulness."

He hesitated a moment and fingered the revolver, as though he would draw my attention to his power. Suddenly his smile vanished, his brows knitted, and he continued with firmness:

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

"There is little use of attempting to deceive you. Do you know the contents of the boxes you so faithfully guarded?"

"In a general way I do," I replied.

"I am glad," he said. "It simplifies matters. And you know the circumstances of their being here on board?"

"I do. The thief confessed his crime."

"Better and better! And now that the criminal is dead, his affairs naturally devolve on me. You are aware I tried to prevent the crime and—"

I could not forbear.

"For a price," I interrupted.

"That matters nothing to you, *señor*," he retorted sharply. "But I shall now make my price and, what is more, take it. The money in this vessel I look upon as treasure-trove. It belongs to the finder. I am the finder, at once by virtue of my office and—of this." He indicated the revolver.

"The treasure belongs to no one—or to every one. Who can claim it or say that this part is mine or that is mine? No one. My claim is the strongest; at least it is strong enough to satisfy me, and must satisfy you."

I wondered that Delavan, were he in the cabin, did not come forth at that, but on second thought I saw

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

it would be a mistake; he had much better hear the villain's plans.

"And now, *señor*," continued Fosse, "that you understand the situation the rest is easy. You will show me the whereabouts of the boxes—which I confess I do not know—also the location of the safe which I am aware is somewhere on this vessel, and then you will consent to take this schooner to Cayenne by the most direct line.

"You can continue in your present office. Diaz will be over you, and I over all. Don't interrupt, *señor*. For your services—on your oath—I will give you five thousand dollars on our arrival in port."

"Of the treasure?" I asked.

"Of the treasure."

"And what of the vessel when we get to Cayenne?"

"I care nothing for the schooner. She will be abandoned and the crew will disperse. They understand—they agree."

So this was the plan—a plan not far from my conception of what he wished. Cayenne, in French Guiana, was the one port on the north coast of South America where his designs might be accomplished. It did not boast in those days of a state of ultra-civilization, and it would make an admirable point from which to scatter the crew.

But he lied about going into port. He might ap-

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

proach within an accessible distance of the town and then desert the schooner. That were feasible, but would he give me five thousand dollars, and leave me free to denounce him? Never.

"And what would be the consequence of my refusal?" I asked. "You are aware that what you contemplate doing is piracy, disguise it as you will."

"That is as it may be," he answered. "It is a plain proposition. The consequences will not trouble us, but you may imagine what your stubbornness may mean to you."

"I will consider it," I said, my heart beginning to hurry.

"You will answer at once," he returned quickly. "If I cannot use you, you are of no more use than the body of Delano. Let me tell you, *señor*, that I hate you like hell, and unless you serve me—"

"One more question," I put in. "What will become of the young lady?"

His face flushed.

"What is that to you?" he demanded, his jealousy leaping to the surface. "It is I who will take care of her. Mine she has consented to be—mine she is."

"Consented?" I exclaimed, leaning forward.

"Yes," he returned, rising to his feet, his eyes burning. "Come, what is your answer?"

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"When did she consent?" I asked hotly, ignoring his question.

"An hour since, you fool."

He said this with an air of triumph and my whole soul rose in revolt.

"You are a liar!" I roared in my sudden passion, throwing policy and personal safety to the winds. "She never would aid a monster, not to save her life, and, by Heaven, neither will I!"

I let this out without an aggressive motion. I simply flung my defiance at him. He looked at me with compressed lips and slowly raised his revolver until it covered me. I saw the lifted hammer and the shining ring of the muzzle—two small objects which were forever impressed on my mind—and I looked for nothing less than immediate death.

Fosse had turned to face me, his back being toward the curtains, as was that of the sailor, who was standing by the door, wide-eyed and alert. At that moment two things happened.

First came Delavan. I saw him emerge from his hiding place, his body bent for a spring, but before he could take a step forward there came a whistling scream or roar as though from the throats of a million devils, and the schooner was struck by something that heeled her to starboard until she was well-nigh on her beam's ends. The rest happened in an instant,

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

and the details are as clear as though I had been a disinterested spectator.

Fosse was thrown backward as the revolver exploded, the bullet going somewhere into the ceiling, while the man himself shot through the door and into the passage, where he brought up with a bang against the booby steps, his weapon flying from his hand. I was flung after him, my shoulder catching the jamb of the door, the blow staying my progress and the shock sending me to the floor. I heard the crashing of crockery as Delavan pitched into the washstand, but I gave him no attention.

Intuitively I knew the schooner had been struck broadside by the opening blast of the storm which had suddenly burst on us. But at that moment I cared little if we went to the bottom, for every sense was directed against the now disarmed villain who would have murdered me. Had the vessel righted I might have acted, but she seemed held over by some powerful force and on the steep incline I could not at once get to my feet.

The benumbing pain of the blow I had received dazed me long enough to allow Fosse to escape me. As he saw me finally pull myself erect and probably marked the wrath in my eye, his own eyes became filled with terror. Grasping the rail of the steps, he hauled himself upward and reached the deck, slam-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

ming the hatch door behind him before I could get to him.

I made no attempt to force my way out. Instead I bolted the door and either jumped or fell to the passage. The sailor, who had also been thrown down, was trying to claw up the incline by holding on to the hand-rail—a brass rod running along the wall, or bulkhead, of the passage.

I landed within a yard of him, myself helpless from the slant of the deck, but I managed to grasp the rail. So steadied, I threw all my power into my right arm and planted my fist under the fellow's ear. He went down in a heap and lay still. There was one less of them, anyhow.

How I got into my room I can hardly tell, but as I entered, the vessel slowly righted as though the helm had been put up, and we were again on an even keel, the fiendish howl of the wind changing to a dull roar.

Delavan was holding on to the foot of the bed, blood streaming down his face from a gash in his forehead, the result of having been pitched into the crockery on the washstand. He was a bit dazed, but it took but a moment or two for him to recover, and binding a towel around his head, we both started for his sister's room.

As I passed the still unconscious sailor I saw Fosse's revolver on the floor and pocketed it. Hurry-

ing on, I fairly ran into the arms of Dave Turk, who at that moment came from Basco's room, holding his head with both hands. He, too, had evidently been thrown down and half stunned.

I almost fell over in my hurry to explain to the old man all that had happened, and incoherent as I was, he grasped the main facts.

"An' what will ye do now, sir, allowin' this hooker stays afloat?" he asked. "Shall I stand by ye here below?"

"No. Go up and help save the schooner. It's in the hands of a pack of fools."

"We might rush them, sir. They be good an' scared belike."

"And who would work the vessel during the muss? No, we are not strong enough; but I will soon get arms from the lazarette. The safety of the schooner is the first consideration. Close the cabin doors as you go up. I will bolt them behind you and barricade all below. Have you the revolver you took from me?"

"No, sir. Diaz had a fancy for it and I had to give it up. They be not quite sure o' me, sir. I have naught but my knife."

"Is the steward one of them?"

"I don't know, but I think not, sir. Bein' a nigger,

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

I don't think they let him in; but I'm down for fifty thousand dollars, sir—when they get it.”

His face broke into a broad, unhandsome grin, but I could have hugged him for his goodness.

“They'll not get a *peso* without fighting for it,” I said. “I have one fellow in the passage who needs tying up, if I haven't killed him! How about those in there?” I motioned to the room he had come from.

“I had just finished when the blow came, sir. They was tossed about like logs o' wood an' both Basco an' his wife be jammed to leeward under the bed. They acted alive. My God! it was horrible, sir! I'll have the line in a jiffy, sir.”

He ran forward and was back in a minute with an unbroken hank of signal halyard. “Now get on deck,” said I, “and leave the rest to us. Keep your weather eye on Fosse. I would to Heaven I had the man we lost to the sharks; I'd be willing to rush those fellows, arms or no arms.”

“Aye, sir,” said Turk; “he was the only decent dago in the bunch. I'll try to pipe ye off to what's likely to happen. Good bye, sir.”

He went on deck just as Delavan came from his sister's room looking like a dissipated Mussulman, with the towel around his head. He gave me a reassuring nod, and after securing the heavy doors to

THE BREAKING OF TWO STORMS

the companionway and drawing the curtains over the skylight we began to work. There was nothing for it but to lock ourselves below and break open the arms chest in the lazarette—something of an undertaking owing to the boxes and trunks piled on it, and the fact that the opening was directly under the skylight. I was well aware that as soon as the demoralized secretary became satisfied that the vessel was safe he would turn his attention to us. It was now open war, and to the death, and from the skylight one armed man on deck could command any part of the cabin.

The first thing to be done was to secure the stunned sailor, for stunned only I soon discovered him to be. We bound him fast and tossed him onto the bed in the room which had once belonged to Diaz; then came the disposal of the bodies of the dead—a most disagreeable feature. There was no opening aft large enough to permit their being launched into the sea, which was now rapidly rising, and to get them on deck was impossible. The matter was settled by our carrying them forward of the amidship bulkhead and depositing them in the galley passage. It would not be long before they would be discovered.

It was a horrible job and I felt that we were desecrating the dead, but there was nothing else to be

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

done. The work was uninterrupted, all the crew being on deck, and when the removal had been accomplished we locked and bolted the bulkhead door, further strengthening it with a barricade of such furniture as we could move. However, it was an assault through the cabin that I looked for and feared; as for the passage, one man might defend it against twenty, were he well armed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

By the capture of the sailor and the faithfulness of Turk, the number against us was now seven, supposing that the steward should not become actively hostile, but until we were armed these odds were great. I had hoped that we might get to work on the lazarette without waiting for darkness, but such hopes were vain.

We had only finished barricading the forward door and were consulting as to our next move when there came a crashing of glass overhead and the skylight was smashed by a series of blows, the curtains ripped away, and the only thing which prevented an immediate attack in force was the heavy grille of steel bars across the opening. The cabin now lay wide to observation from above, as did the sky from below, but there was not a face in sight. Obviously prudence prevailed on deck.

I noticed that the erstwhile bank of cloud was now broken into masses of heavy scud flying from the west, and from their direction as well as from

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the increasing pitch of the vessel I knew we were running before the wind. Under what sail we were I could only guess.

I inferred that Turk had sense enough to suggest a storm trysail, though had I been in command I should have hove the schooner to and ridden out the storm. Did Diaz know into what he was running? I very much doubted.

With my face upturned to the broken skylight, I was thinking of the safety of the vessel, when I saw the muzzle of a rifle thrust through the bars above. At first there was no head behind it, but gradually, over the edge of the skylight, there rose a face. It was Fosse's.

The shadow of the silk portière protected me from his sight as I stood just within the passage. He peered cautiously down through the bars, and thinking that I had him, I pulled my revolver and fired at the partly exposed head.

And I would have potted the fellow then and there had it not been for one of those same bars that protected us. My bullet struck this and was deflected, entering the woodwork just beneath the eyes of the spying villain. He disappeared as though knocked in the head, and then back came the rifle barrel, which was now uncertainly aimed toward the pass-

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

age. I jumped in time to evade the shot, the bullet going through the silk curtain and into the floor.

With this interchange of civilities, which filled the cabin with smoke, hostilities ceased for a time. No one ventured to show a head again as long as daylight lasted, and I should not have fired if he had. I had wasted one of my five shots and was not ready to take the offensive.

The situation had materialized. The presence of Delavan was, as far as I knew, unsuspected by the mutineers, and the cabin deck was besieged. Just as long as we held the lazarette I would have no fear of the schooner being deserted or deliberately wrecked, and that she was well in hand at present I had reason to believe by the way she was acting. There was no rain, but the roar of both wind and sea was now plain, the sound coming clear through the open skylight.

The girl had almost ceased to be a factor in this contest. Doubtless Fosse considered her final acquiescence in his plans certain—as certain to him as our final subjugation, and I had little fear that she would be injured even were her brother and I worsted. Yet the thought of her being in that villain's power maddened me more than anything that had gone before. A man of Fosse's type could have little appreciation of refinement like hers.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Save to preserve her, her fortune and my own life, I had no thought. Delavan's mission was somewhat broader: he wished all I did, and besides—to secure the money belonging to his house. He had never seen a great deal of his sister; the affection he bore her, was of a genuine brotherly nature, and not to be compared with that of a lover—even an unavowed lover.

How long this state of siege would last there could be no telling, though I was sure that active operations against us would not begin as long as the storm held. But the bad weather, I thought, would not be protracted, for on consulting the barometer in my cabin I noticed that the mercury was already rising.

But in war or peace, one must eat. And eat we could, as we had the steward's storeroom within the lines of our barricade. Though we had no water (and the crew was short of that) we had plenty of wines of all kinds, and light wine would quench thirst to a degree. There was an abundance of food—table delicacies, potted meats and the like. We might stand a siege for weeks, but I knew that the present state of things would not endure long. Indeed, I would see that it did not—once I got to the arms chest.

It was well into the afternoon before I felt the need of food, and for hours nothing had happened.

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

I had sat on the floor of the passage with my eye on the broken skylight and my ear tuned for any attack on the booby hatch. The forward door I did not consider; for the present the dead guarded that. Delavan and his sister were in the room near me, the door open so that we might talk. The vessel romped wildly over the seas, flying. God knew where, and my nerves were again tightening under the strain when I thought of eating.

I gave Delavan the revolver and went forward to the pantry. The door was swinging wildly on its hinges, and inside lying on the floor amid a mass of broken crockery, was the steward. At first I thought he was dead, but it took but a few moments to convince myself that he was only dead drunk. An open brandy bottle in a rack explained everything. I did not believe he was addicted to the habit of drink and thought it more than likely that his fright at the breaking of the storm, the smashing of crockery and general confusion had led him to get heart from a bottle—as many a better fool has done—and he had succumbed to too heavy doses of “Dutch courage.” I dragged him into the passage and left him. Then I procured enough food to stay our appetites and carried it aft.

I would have given much for a view of the deck or an inkling of what was brewing. From the port

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

in my room I could only get a glimpse of flying water, the surges washing the glass each instant, but as the day declined I fancied that there was a warmth to the clouds as though the west was thinning of its rack. But we drove along as fast as ever and I knew that the gallant *Siesta* was outrunning the seas.

When at length the sun set, the cabin went as dark as a pit. I sneaked into the captain's room, which was full of strange noises, and lighted the small lantern. We had searched the place for arms that day and found none, though I had discovered in a drawer two sets of handcuffs and the tools Delano had used in getting at the lazarette. The handcuffs were now useless, but I took the wrench and screw-driver, and putting out the light, crawled under the cabin table and loosened the bolts that came up through the rug.

No sooner had the last bolt gone, however, than the whole table fetched away with a roll of the schooner and jumped across the cabin, tearing around the room with each heave of the sea, like a wild animal on a rampage. For a moment I was in terrible danger, not being able to see the thing which might bear down on me and crush me without warning.

The heavy mahogany was flung hither and thither

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

with terrific violence, but it fortunately cleared me, and I finally jumped into the captain's room out of its reach. At last, with a splintering crash the wild table became jammed somewhere and held its peace. Later I saw it wedged under the piano, which was wrecked by the force of the impact.

If this racket was heard on deck there was no immediate indication of it. The great square of the smashed skylight was just discernible against the sky, but no head marred its faint outline. However, I did mark one thing which impressed me as a good omen. A single star hung aloft like a star of hope. It told me the storm was about over, though we were still bowling along under a gale which was driving us—Heaven knew where; I did not think Diaz had an idea.

It was an easy matter to roll away the rug, and not a very difficult one for Delavan and me to lift the section of the false deck and pull up the lazarette hatch. To get at the arms was a matter which gave me some concern on account of the darkness and the boxes, but we were bent on the business and I was about to drop into the little hold when there came a glimmer of light from above and a lantern was set on the grating in such a manner as to illuminate the cabin.

Delavan and I leaped into the passage just in time

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

to avoid the rifle shot which immediately followed. We had been blocked. There was enough light to show the open hold to those above, even to disclose the boxes therein. I had unwittingly betrayed the hiding place of the treasure, and that the fact was appreciated was shown by the shouts that came down to us.

And now what was to be done? Between nervous strain, excitement, the blow which had lamed my shoulder, and lack of rest the night before, I was worn out and made hopeless by this failure. To me it seemed that Fate was mocking us. In utter abandonment I lay down and slept, leaving Delavan to watch.

When I awoke it was broad day, and the discouragement of our situation rushed at me as I came to myself after a series of happy dreams. However, the night had passed without event. We were still safely intrenched, and it began to appear that Fosse and his gang were as afraid of us as we were of them.

The weather had moderated and we were still going due east, apparently under very easy sail. Indeed, we seemed to be wafted along at a rate no greater than two or three knots an hour. The sea had gone down wonderfully, and the air freshly flowing through the shattered skylight was less suffo-

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

cating, while the ocean sparkled under as clear a blue as ever graced a September day in the North.

The only event of that morning was the appearance of the steward, with whom I hardly knew how to deal. He was ill and worthless to us, but I was afraid to give him his liberty, and so locked him in my own room.

The other captive I found still securely bound, and frightened half to death. He swore he knew nothing of a plot to capture the schooner, but one could not believe him under oath. I left him after giving him food and a glass of light wine, for his tongue was hanging from his mouth.

Not a single demonstration came from those on deck, not even from Turk to let me know that he was still aboard. Up to noon tranquility reigned, a tranquility that grew more and more ominous as time sped. But for the fact that we still held on before the wind I should have thought the schooner was abandoned.

Ah, but the suspense was wearing! What the silence meant we could only guess, and we guessed at a dozen things, though one seemed no more likely than another. I think Violette was the least discouraged of the three. With her own hands she prepared our meal, standing watch herself while Delavan and I ate in her cabin. I was not thinking of

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

such a thing as love at that time, but I now know that my love for her was growing with the hours.

But we were not destined to stagnate for long nor eat out our hearts in suspense. It was perhaps two o'clock when, with such ease as to be scarcely noticed, the schooner suddenly lost her way. That we had run aground I guessed at once from the sound of a slight grating under the keel which preceded our actual stopping and an almost imperceptible list or heeling of the vessel. From the absence of shock I gathered that we had gone on either a sand-bar or some shelving beach of coral.

For a moment we looked at each other in astonishment, and then, down the skylight came the shouting of orders and the sound of running feet. I ran to a port and looked out. Yes, we were aground, and that, too, not far from land, though what land it could be I had no idea, not having taken an observation since making the landfall of the Venezuelan mountains days before, and having no knowledge of our speed by which I could arrive at a conclusion by dead reckoning.

However, there lay land; land typical of the latitude in its peculiar beauty. There was a white beach on which a low surf was running, and behind it a jungle of palms and dense tropical growth. It could be nothing but an island, of course; but what island,

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

whether large or small, inhabited or otherwise, I could not tell.

I was certain we were not near a town, for there was not a sign of a habitation anywhere. We appeared to be in a bowl-shaped bay, the land from the starboard side being not more than half a mile away.

There was much thumping and noise on deck, and while I was looking from the port I heard a boat fall into the water with a mighty splash. What were they about to do? Leave us hard and fast to be battered to pieces by the next storm? A second thought answered the question. They would never leave the treasure, nor would Turk desert without giving some sign.

The view from where I was lacked breadth, and as the noise above had suddenly ceased with the fall of the boat, Delavan and I decided to take a look from the pantry. We were running forward and had come abreast of the bathroom, when its door was dashed open and the next instant the passage seemed to be filled with men.

I had but just time to catch sight of Fosse in the rear when I was struck down by the foremost hand. A great flash of fire went through my brain, then all was dark and I seemed to be whirling downward through an infinity of black space.

When I came to myself I found I was lying on

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the floor of the cabin, bound hand and foot, and propped against the bulkhead near the door of the captain's room. Broken glass lay thick about me and I was soaking wet, the last condition being explained when I saw a bucket of sea water standing by me. It was evident I had been resuscitated for a purpose.

The cabin doors were wide open, and on one side of the room were piled a number of boxes which I recognized as having been in the lazarette. Two rifles lay on the floor by the open hatch, and over the hole bent Fosse, giving directions to some one below and lending a hand to lift when a case was thrust upward.

From the work that had already been accomplished, I gathered that I had been unconscious for some time, but I suffered no pain save a dull headache. I was too numb to feel acutely, yet my misery was so great mentally and physically that involuntarily I groaned aloud. At the sound Fosse stopped work and looked at me. As he saw I had regained consciousness he came over to me with a malicious grin.

"Ah-ha, *señor*, you are back in time to see things of interest," he said, speaking in Spanish. "I would not have you miss it. Who wins? I was praying you might not die until you saw how useless it was

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

to oppose me. You like not your condition? Well, it is through your own doing; you defied me. So! We will see. Have you anything to say?"

"Where are the others?" I managed to ask.

"Ah, the others? You mean the lady and her large brother? I know all now, *señor*, and it would have been better had you confided in me—told me of his presence on board. Did I not wish it when we were leaving Matanzas? Yes, you are my witness. But it is too late now. You will see him no more—nor the young lady. No, *señor*, no. She looks higher than an American pig."

He stood looking down on me, plainly intending to goad me. I made him no answer—there was none to make. He laughed aloud as though enjoying my despair, and returned to his pleasant duty of getting out the treasure.

I felt hopeless, indeed. There were no signs of either Delavan or Turk. I could not think that Fosse would deliberately kill the girl's brother, and unless he had lost his life in the attack, I had no doubt that he would be spared; but I could not understand why I should lie thus closely bound, unless it were that Turk had been suspected and made away with before he could help me.

There was one thing sure; it was my own stupidity or lack of foresight which had permitted this re-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

versal of fortune. While we had been guarding the cabin and the bulkhead door, the little skylight to the bathroom had been entirely neglected. Later, I found that the sash had been quietly unscrewed and lifted off, and the light bars protecting it pried away. Ingress from the deck had then been easy, and we had been overrun from a quarter I had not guarded.

I was so low mentally and physically that even as I saw Fosse ripping the covers from the bags, and noted the red marks which denoted Miss Montagna's property, I was not conscious of an internal protest. I was so helpless and hopeless that I even ceased to think. I looked for no mercy at the hands of the secretary, and that I had been brought to my senses was, in my opinion, but a prelude to some fiendish act on the part of my enemy.

But I did not lie there inert for long. Presently I became dully conscious that some one was silently and cautiously stealing along the side of the passage, the curtain of which had been torn from its supporting grille. I could not see the face, but by the man's proportions I knew it must be the boatswain. Fosse did not see him because he had his back to the passage and his face toward me, that he might observe me by merely lifting his eyes.

Life came back with a rush, then. Turk drew

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting man, until he had come to within a foot of the after end of the passage. Then, with a bound, he hurled himself on his stooping victim, and catching him by the throat, flung him into the lazarette, jumped for the hatch-cover, and in less than ten seconds from his leap had the hole secured, with those in the lazarette prisoners under his feet.

From below there came a muffled cry, and that was all. The old man's face was aflame with excitement, and, with his long grey hair streaming from his bared head, he looked like one of the ancient pagan gods as he planted his heavy body on the hatch and caught up a rifle.

"If ye can roll yerself over to me, sir, I'll have ye out o' limbo in a second," he said softly. "I daren't get off o' the hatch yet."

He drew his knife and stooped, his quick eye playing up the steps, through the skylight, and along the passage as if he feared immediate discovery. I threw myself down and somehow got to him. With a few well-directed slashes, he set me free.

CHAPTER XVII

ON DECK

I GOT to my feet, stretched my stiffened muscles and let out an oath expressing both anger and relief. Though my revulsion of feeling was absolute, and life and hope once more meant something to me, my momentary rage was an unholy passion as I caught up the remaining rifle from the floor. Had the hatch been open and Fosse in sight I make no doubt that I would have shot him without a second thought. I believe my murderous feeling must have shown in my face, for as I looked down at the hatch on which Turk still stood, the old man went so far as to lay his hand on the barrel of my weapon and exclaim in a hoarse whisper :

“No, sir! no, sir! Don’t do it now, and while ye be hot against him—besides ’twill warn them on deck. Time enough for him, sir; let them below smother a bit—there’s others need lookin’ to.”

His words brought the blood from my brain and, moreover, I saw their force.

"Where's Delavan?" I asked.

"I don't know, sir, but I hardly think he's killed. I heard no shot. Like as not he's in the same fix ye were—tied up somewhere, belike."

"How did you happen along so late?"

"Why, sir, they left me on deck because I was too big to get through the hole they made. 'Twas but a while since I saw ye through the skylight, lyin' trussed up, and it made me glad, as I feared they had knifed all hands below. It bothered my wits to help ye, sir, but when I nosed my chance I acted. The nigger steward came up out of the booby hatch and left it open, and when he went for'ard I sneaked down an' done the rest. There ye have it, sir; but we're not all to the good yet."

I held out my hand and wrung his great, hard fist, and for the moment I was so weak that tears of gratitude welled to my eyes.

"Who's on deck?" I asked, turning aside.

"Stophe, the carpenter—on watch like."

"Is he armed?"

"Aye, with a rifle, I think."

"Where are Diaz and the others?"

"Him, with three o' the hands, are gone ashore in the long-boat after water, sir; we be main short o' that, only about a couple o' spoons a day. If I can get this hatch fast I'll make my affadavid to have

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

Stophe where he belongs afore ye can say Dennis twice. Then we can breathe easy for a time."

"No," I said. "If Stophe comes down, pot him at once. Before we open the hatch I must look up Delavan. Stay where you are and don't be taken by surprise."

I started in search of my friend and his sister. The second mate's room, in which I had kept our prisoner, was empty, and the man had evidently been liberated; the door of my own room had been smashed in and the steward was gone. Undoubtedly my having made the latter a prisoner saved him from death, for had he been found below, and free, he would have been killed off-hand.

Miss Montagna's cabin was also empty, but the confusion of the room indicated that a fight had taken place; as, indeed, there had, for there Delavan was captured. Fosse's room was locked. I knocked softly and was finally answered by the girl. When she recognized my voice she screamed, but afterward told me she was unhurt. As I could not force the door then, I left her with the assurance that I would be back shortly and liberate her.

There were but two more rooms, Delano's and Basco's. The former was empty, but in the latter I found Delavan, trussed hand and foot and thrown upon the bed. He had been roughly handled and

could hardly move at first when I released him and explained how the tables had been turned again.

Together we returned to the cabin. The proper mode of procedure was now clear enough. The discovery of Delavan and his sister unhurt had reduced the impotent rage that possessed me at my liberation, and as I am not murderous by habit of thought, I knew it was imperative to remove the hatch else the imprisoned men would smother to death. I no longer had a fear of them for we were now in a position to hold them harmless. There was a continuous knocking on the hatch now, and it was obvious that those below were suffering. I got the handcuffs from the captain's desk, and while Delavan stood to receive the prisoners and I brought my rifle to bear, Turk removed the cover.

Fosse at once raised his face to the opening, gasping for breath and blinking in the strong light. His usually pale face was a dark red and he was furious as he placed his hands on the edge of the opening, but he almost fell backwards as he saw me standing free.

"Pass up your arms, you cursed Patagonian," said Delavan, "and if a muzzle comes first down goes the hatch again for good and all."

I think it was then and not before that Fosse realized the situation. His black eyes grew small and

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

his flushed face paled, but he said nothing as he passed up his revolver, butt first. Delavan caught him by the collar and dragged him out, while I clapped the irons on his wrists. There were two others in the hold, one being the fellow I had captured. They were both glad enough to yield, their faces showing how near to being smothered they had been. As we had but one pair of irons for the two, we put a bracelet on the right wrist of each.

So far so good; but if our success had tended to calm my temper it only seemed to enrage Delavan's. He was unreasonably violent and it was all I could do to prevent him from assaulting Fosse, who now stood as shamefaced as a boy caught stealing jam. I could well imagine his feelings. He had been overcome on the point of success, and by a common sailor who had hoodwinked him for days, and his pride must have received a terrible shock. Meek enough he looked, but under his exterior I knew there must be seething a veritable hell of passion. His face rapidly regained its normal expression, but the baleful glances he flung at Turk, who now stood guard at the steps, showed that he knew upon whom to place the blame of his disaster. In his pocket we found the key of his room; and while Delavan went to release Violette, I started for the deck to settle with the carpenter.

He was standing far forward, seemingly at the heel of the bowsprit, and by him stood another man whom I at once recognized as the steward. They were both talking earnestly as they looked shoreward, where I could see the long-boat drawn up on the white sand. I had no eyes then for the schooner's condition, for the moment I marked the distant boat my attention was diverted by more serious matters. As I stepped from the cockpit to the deck, the steward saw me. Uttering an exclamation which I could not hear, he stood transfixed as if by terror. That brought the carpenter into action.

He was of a different stripe from the negro, for, as he turned and caught sight of me, he reached for the rifle leaning against the anchor stock. He was in the act of bringing it to his shoulder, when I took a quick sight at him and fired. He did not move, but trained his rifle on me, and I heard the click of the falling hammer.

But no explosion followed, and I pumped another cartridge into my gun and fired again. Once more I missed him, but this time the fellow sprang to the rail and plunged into the sea, striking out for the shore. It was plain that he was uninjured.

I ran forward. The steward, instead of showing fight, dropped to his knees and began to beg for mercy. As he was unarmed and had not been bellig-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

erent, I ordered him to the galley. He got up, swearing he would serve me and that he had had nothing to do with the uprising of the crew, which indeed I believed to be the truth.

The carpenter was in plain sight, swimming rapidly. I might have filled his black head full of holes as he went, but I was not in the mood to do murder. I picked up his rifle, and then discovered that my salvation probably lay in the fact that its magazine was empty.

I think I staggered like a drunkard as I returned to the cabin. The girl had been released and when she saw me she smiled bravely, though I knew that after the mental agony she had experienced the smile was an effort. And she did more than smile. She held out her hand to me as though she were greeting me after a long absence, and to save my life I could not help lifting her fingers to my lips, and that, too, with a spirit apart from mere gallantry.

For I was far from feeling gallant. My head now ached fiercely and my system was reacting from the late exciting experience—so much so that I sank to the divan-like locker and the wrecked room began to spin. Doubtless I would have fainted outright had not Violette noticed the change on my face and hastily brought me a glass of wine. Even now my memory recalls her as she bent over me, her eyes all

solicitude, and had we been alone I think that the tide of my affection for her would have broken loose, so weak had I become. Fosse was a witness to this small episode, and though the sight must have been as gall to him, his face did not change.

And now there was to be considered the menace of the five men ashore, for the escaped carpenter would inform Diaz of the changed condition aboard the schooner. Though he knew no more than that I was free, the rest would be surmised. Turk told me that every man in the long-boat was armed somehow, though he believed them to be short of cartridges.

He told me more. It appeared that after the dead had been found in the passage and thrown overboard with scant ceremony, the schooner had been deliberately grounded. It now lay on a sand-spit or bar running parallel with the beach.

There were coral reefs outside for I could plainly see the curl of the surf as it boiled over them, but there was a fairly broad passage between the ragged teeth of the barrier, and the boatswain told us this opening had been steered for, the land having been in sight long before.

There had been no attempt at navigation, but in the opinion of Diaz, who was without a chart to consult, the schooner was aground somewhere on the

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

coast of South America. So far as the old boat-swain could make out, it had been Fosse's purpose to divide the treasure at once, fire the schooner, and with the long-boat skirt the land eastward until he approached a town where the old cock-and-bull story of a wreck was to be told and where the crew would at once disperse, Fosse taking the girl and her fortune with him.

The secretary did not then know of the existence on board of Delavan, and whether I was to be killed, left to my fate, or taken along with the others, the old man had no means of knowing. The secretary had kept his own council and ruled the crew like an autocrat; his least wish was law and his commands were obeyed without question.

As far as I could see the schooner was uninjured. She lay for more than half her length on a bed of solid white sand, the bottom showing plainly through the clear, green water. At low tide the vessel careened a few degrees, but not uncomfortably; and but for the dullness of the brass work and the triangular storm-sail, she appeared much the same as when I gave my last order on her deck.

There had been no wanton destruction thus far, and the only unusual object aft was the saluting gun, a breech-loading brass cannon of some two or three feet, which had been brought astern from the bow

and trained on the cabin doors as though to blow them down.

Such, indeed, had been their intention, but the mutineers lacked proper ammunition. They had opened many cartridges to obtain powder, but the peculiar formation of the gun's breech made this expedient unavailing. This accounted for their own lack of cartridges. Little they knew that the idea was to be their own undoing.

Would the five men ashore return to the schooner? Undoubtedly; they knew of but one man to oppose them, and that myself, though they might suspect that Turk had played them false. There were but three of us, not counting the steward, whose cowardice put him out of consideration as a fighting force. We had the advantage in position, however, and so long as we remained aboard the schooner we might hope to defend ourselves successfully against them.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ATTACK

BUT how long were we to remain, and if we did not remain, where were we to go? The men ashore had the only boat fit for use at sea, and the schooner was hopelessly aground. For us to abandon the *Siesta* would be but to transfer ourselves from the comfortable, and at present safe, shelter of the schooner to the exposed beach. Nothing was to be gained by that move.

As for hoping that Diaz and his men would desert their share of a million dollars—that was hardly reasonable. They might remain on land and find food and water until the *Siesta* broke up, in the meantime keeping us in a state of constant suspense; or, as was more probable, they might, with some hope of success, attack us when we were worn with watching.

We decided that the only thing we could do was to hold our position, in the hope that some passing vessel would sight us and come to our rescue.

To that end I set the American flag at the mast-

THE ATTACK

head, union down, and then went aloft to look around. From the advantage of the high position, I saw we were ashore on an island, as I had surmised, and not a large one, for I could see beyond it a faint, blue loom on the horizon, which showed the presence of land. And skirting the rim of the ocean was a dark, purple streak that told of a distant steamer going north.

The island might have been a mile wide and five miles long, mostly barren, though opposite us was a thick, tropical growth, indicating the existence of fresh water. There was no sign of a habitation, nor at first did I see the men who had gone ashore, though the long-boat lay a black speck on the beach, its white sail scarcely whiter than the surrounding sand.

As I was about to descend to the deck, however, I saw three men come from the jungle, rolling a barrel before them, and a fourth and fifth running to the boat. I saw them get the water aboard, push off, hoist sail and start toward us. Then I went down.

"We had better let them know the situation at once," I said to Delavan, who stood on the deck looking at the boat through a glass. "I am not anxious to shed blood if it can be avoided, and now is the time to prevent it." I picked up my rifle.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"Isn't it possible to let them come aboard and then gather them in?" he asked.

"They are five to our three," I returned. "And what would we do with them if we made them prisoner without mishap to us—the last being unlikely? We have no irons; cords are unreliable, and if we confined them below they might break out, or even fire the vessel. Of course we need the water they have, there not being more than five gallons on board, but the risk is too great. Suppose they should get the best of us again."

"You are right," he said. "Warn them off."

With that I took a long sight at the oncoming craft and fired. No attention was paid to the shot—and little wonder. The report could not be heard, and the plunging of a single bullet would be unnoticed. I let them come so near that my voice could be heard; then, leaping on the rail, I swung my cap and shouted, after which I deliberately fired at the bow of the boat. I heard the bullet slap into the woodwork and saw a man stand up and aim at me.

I dropped behind the bulwark, sighted and fired again, and with that the boat sheered off and returned to the beach. If Diaz had not believed the carpenter's report of my escape, he was probably now convinced of its truth.

THE ATTACK

That night Turk watched on deck and Delavan guarded the prisoners below. I undressed and tumbled into bed, unstrapping the knife from my leg and throwing it on the console, but the hidden keys I entirely forgot, an oversight that well-nigh cost my life.

I slept the sleep of the tired and just. No attack was made on us, the growing moon giving ample light to reveal the approach of a boat.

For five days this state of uneventful siege continued, Delavan, Turk and I watching by turns all night and sleeping by day.. I had at last gained confidence in the steward. He was quick, willing, and respectful, and the way he was talked to by Fosse, whom he fed with the other prisoners, was enough to make him hate the Cuban. He swore over and over that he had never been approached by one of the mutineers, and that all he cared for was to get back home.

Altogether, we seemed to have the situation pretty well under our own control, and we suffered no real inconvenience save for want of a plentiful supply of water. I say we suffered no inconvenience. I mean in the matter of food and shelter, for the constant guard over our prisoners and the strain on our nerves due to the knowledge that near us was a virulent enemy who would not desert us, kept us

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

watchful and anxious. And, moreover, the weather was beginning to trouble me; not because there was any visible indication of a storm in the immediate future, but from an intuitive feeling that we were in for something. Though the barometer was then higher than I had ever known it to be, the trade-wind cloud had given place to a blank sky of whitish blue that seemed to lower and shut us in.

The wind had died; even the sea breeze at sunset came but as a whisper and went out. The heat was awful, despite awnings and frequent sluicing of the deck, and even at night one gasped; sleeping below had become well-nigh impossible. What these conditions foreboded I could not tell, but I knew they were not normal at that season. Despite the weather glass I feared a hurricane and that would mean absolute destruction to us. Even were we ashore, the result might be tragic, while for the schooner, her planks would strew the beach.

The weather and the surrounding circumstances finally worked on me until I looked on life with a jaundiced eye. The wealth aboard seemed small in contrast with the ever-present danger. I had been afloat but little more than one month, and yet it seemed that for years I had been on the *Siesta* fighting against odds.

Six weeks before I had been on land and happy

THE ATTACK

in my ignorance of the future; now I was a prisoner of the sea, and would have given all I ever hoped to be worth for liberty—liberty, but only on one condition: I would not have it again and be alone. I did not care to think of what might happen were we suddenly rescued by some passing vessel and each went his and her own way.

With the waning of the moon and the consequent loss of light, our danger increased. The time came when two of us had to remain on deck at night, in order that both ends of the vessel might be guarded; in the darkness a boat might easily steal close alongside without being seen.

But we made some preparation against attack, even should Diaz and his party gain a foothold forward, for the attempt would naturally be made at the bow. In breaking out more arms and ammunition from the lazarette, we had discovered a box of blank cartridges for the saluting cannon, and to Turk there came a brilliant idea—an idea which undoubtedly proved to be our salvation.

He suggested that the gun be charged, filled with bullets to its muzzle, and so placed on the quarter as to rake one side of the deck for its entire length. This was done; a lanyard was attached to the firing pin and the whole was then covered with a tarpaulin. To no one was given particular care of the piece, nor

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

did it then appear to me to be a wonderfully strategic move, though it might perhaps be wheeled into position and be a menace to an approaching boat.

But for the presence of the girl the *ennui* of this waiting would have been nothing short of damnable; but there was nothing for it now save to wait and hope. As yet we had seen neither sail nor steamer on our side of the island, and the chances of being sighted ourselves, were slight. I had taken an observation, worked it out, and was now certain of our location. We lay fourteen degrees, eleven minutes, north, and exactly sixty-five degrees, west. The island was marked on the chart as a mere, nameless speck and is not indicated on general atlases, but I now knew the land bearing eastward must be the island of Blanquilla, itself uninhabited though much larger than the one on which we were stranded.

Beyond it lay Los Hermanos, we being about one hundred and fifty miles from the nearest point on the South American coast, and out of the line of general navigation. When I made this discovery I cursed myself for having fooled the Venezuelan gunboat.

I remember well it was on a Friday when the end came. I mean the beginning of the end. There had been an indefinable fear hanging over me all the day before—a fear of something—a dread, or nervous-

THE ATTACK

ness which was not lessened when I consulted the barometer and found it still high.

I looked closely to the prisoners. They were safely manacled and lay on the floor of the captain's cabin, panting like dogs. Fosse was surly and would not speak, only looking at me from the corners of his half-closed eyes. Delavan, rifle in hand, had them all in plain sight from where he sat at the foot of the companionway.

Miss Violette sat under the hot awning of the cock-pit, the languor of the day possessing her. It was a weary condition of things, with no bright outlook to filip the spirits.

After sunset on Thursday the world turned black; the moon would not rise until near daybreak. There was a small lantern in the captain's room, giving just enough light to break the intense gloom and render the movements of the prisoners visible, but on account of the deadly heat the cabin lamp was left extinguished.

I walked the deck with Miss Violette, our turns being short on account of the darkness, both of us speaking in whispers, not from the nature of our conversation, which was trivial enough in comparison with the matter which was forever intruding itself upon me—my passion for this girl—but on account of the general oppression and the intense

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

silence surrounding us. Not a sound came from the land, though usually there were no end of mysterious croakings and snappings wafted over the water from the jungle. My nervousness was growing to a climax—I was obliged to walk, and had it not been for my peculiar position I might have screamed outright.

It was something after ten o'clock when the girl stopped in her walk, touched my arm and said:

"I think I heard a splash—like that of an oar."

I had heard nothing. I bent my ear toward the sea, but the silence was more like a thing than a condition; my oppressed breathing was all that I could distinguish. As for seeing, it was so black that one would have to feel the way in going forward, and even the white dress at my side looked but ghostly.

I went below and made the steward take Delavan's post, the big man joining Turk forward. If, indeed, the mutineers had picked out this night to make their attack they could not have selected a better one, and I wished our fighting force to be ready.

But the hours waned on in silence. Midnight came and the young lady had retired to the cockpit where she dozed on the soft cushions, being protected by the awning from the heavy dew. I felt

THE ATTACK

my way forward and came upon Turk standing amidst the ships by the bulwark.

He challenged me sharply as he heard me, and I had but just made myself known to him when a strange sound filled the air and the vessel began to tremble. At first I thought that my intense nervousness had affected my knees, but as a low rumbling like distant thunder shook the air and grew into a roar that came from no single direction and the trembling increased until I was obliged to grasp the bulwark to keep on my feet, I knew the nature of the phenomenon.

It was an earthquake and it continued but a scant two score of seconds, ceasing as suddenly as it began. But in that time the schooner became alive with sounds, and, it being hard aground, I felt the vessel shift under my feet. The main boom was thrown from its jack and came down on its topping lift with a bang; the blocks rattled against the iron travelers, and below I could hear every movable thing giving out its voice, the whole forming a bewildering chorus. It was like the sounds that follow a terrific explosion, but in a few moments all was quiet.

There had been no heave, thank God! and, therefore, no tidal wave would follow and overwhelm us.

In the midst of the confusion I had heard the girl

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

shriek, and as soon as the quake ceased I ran back to her.

"El trembola!" she exclaimed, catching me by the arm, more terror in her voice than I had ever heard.

"Aye, an earthquake—and no harm done," I said, trying to reassure her. "This part of the world is always unsteady on its legs. I believe it was the coming of that thing that has been preying on my nerves. I feel better, but, whew! isn't it hot!"

"Frightfully so," she said wearily, albeit there was yet the tremble of fright in her voice. "I was asleep and just dreaming that the prisoners—"

At that point she was interrupted by Turk, who sang out:

"Aft, there—Mr. Raymond. Do ye see that light ashore?"

"I see it," came the voice of Delavan from the bow. And then I caught sight of it. It was a small flare. It came down to the water's edge, leaving a star-track on the smooth bay, and waved around as though someone was swinging a torch. I joined the two forward.

"What do you make of it?" I asked Delavan.

"Blessed if I can imagine what it means," he answered, "but it is some deviltry, like as not. We will keep our eyes open."

THE ATTACK

I watched it for some ten minutes, when it suddenly went out as though quenched in water.

"Beats me, sir," said Turk, "but it can't mean distress ashore. They may ha' been scared by the shake, or mayhap, the long-boat was set adrift an' they be lookin' for it."

"Possibly," I said. "I hope so, anyway. "It would end our danger from them."

Matters again assumed the quiet of death, and I walked my post. Slowly it drew toward dawn; the east at last gave light enough to see along the deck. The sun would be up in a jiffy.

The girl was asleep in the cock-pit, and as I glanced from her sweet, unconscious face I noticed that the cabin doors were closed. To this day I believe that Providence drew my attention to the fact.

Why closed? was the question that at once presented itself. If the earthquake had shaken them together, why had not the steward reopened them; it must be suffocating in the cabin. I stepped into the cock-pit, and pulling one-half of the door outward, looked in.

The light was not strong, but I saw enough to bring my heart to a standstill. The steward lay on his back at the bottom of the companion steps, with the haft of a knife sticking from his left breast, and strange it was that at such a supreme moment I

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

should have recognized the dirk as the one I had captured.

The next instant I caught a glimpse of a man—one of the lately manacled sailors—standing in the passage, a revolver in his hand. Instinctively I knew what had happened. As the fellow saw me he sent up a shout of warning, at the same time leveling his revolver at me. In a flash I brought up my rifle.

The two reports were simultaneous. I felt a red-hot iron run from my elbow to my shoulder and saw the fellow's knees bend as he pitched to a fall. Then, with a yell that might have waked the dead, I slammed the door shut, caught the hasp over the staple, the rifle falling from my grasp, and sprang to the deck, my right arm useless.

God! Will I ever forget that instant? Delavan was on the starboard side of the deck, and hearing the shots and my cry came running aft, when I saw Fosse spring from the booby hatch and fire at him with a revolver. Whether or not he had missed his aim I did not know, but before he could get his weapon into play again Delavan closed with him, and the two went staggering over to port. Impressions are wonderfully rapid when the brain is under stress; I can yet see the fury that sprang to my friend's face as he recognized his opponent.

As they went from my field of vision I heard a

THE ATTACK

mingling of yells and curses forward, and saw a number of men struggle from the galley-hatch and start aft. They were met by Turk who emptied two shells at them, and then, clubbing his rifle, he sprang into the group. In a second I saw him go down with a couple of men on top of him.

There were three men remaining, two with revolvers, and one armed only with a knife. I did not attempt to fathom the mystery of their presence, though I seemed to know that those ashore had somehow got a foothold on the *Siesta*.

As the trio came abreast of the mainmast and saw me standing all unarmed, they stopped, and the armed men deliberately aimed and fired at me, though by Heaven's grace neither bullet took effect. Instinctively I dropped into the cock-pit for shelter and there saw my rifle. I grasped it and attempted to recharge; but, with my left hand alone, I was unable to work the lever.

Was this, then, the end of it? It looked to be, and God knows I prayed at that instant as I had never prayed before. Helpless, I crouched against the doors with my face toward the stern, waiting for the blow that I felt was sure to come. In a vague way I knew that Violette had disappeared from the cock-pit, but now, in my despair, I saw her. She was kneeling on the deck behind the black lump made

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

by the tarpaulin-covered cannon, her face like chalk, her nether lip caught under her upper teeth, and her eyes blazing. Even as my eyes fell on her, she pulled the gun's lanyard. I heard the roar of the piece; the gun leaped backward and the tarpaulin was flung into the air. Then the shouting suddenly ceased and all became quiet.

But quiet for a brief instant only. Before I could make a move, and as though the explosion of the cannon had been a signal, there came another convulsion of the earth, so violent, so sudden that the schooner reeled as though it would fall over, and I was fairly shaken from my feet.

Between the concussion of the cannon and the violent dancing of the vessel I was clean out of my head for a moment or two, and do not know what happened. When I came to a realizing sense of where and what I was, I noticed the blood pouring in a steady stream from my shirt sleeve. I looked aft, then forward.

The girl had been thrown down and was struggling to rise. The deck amidships seemed covered with prostrate forms, and as I looked toward the bow I saw Turk pull himself to his feet and comb back his bloody hair with a bloodier hand. Then I fell and fainted outright.

CHAPTER XIX

CONSEQUENCES

I RETURNED to the world rather bewildered as to things in general, and at first with only the knowledge that Delavan was standing over me as I lay on the cock-pit cushions; then came the comprehension that my right arm was bandaged from elbow to shoulder.

I looked from it to my friend stupidly enough, no doubt, then swung myself up to a sitting position, the act making the horizon wheel rapidly, though it steadied somewhat as I heard a sound near me. I turned in time to see Violette put her hands to her face, sink to a seat and sob convulsively.

"Thank God, old man!" said Delavan, getting his arm around me and smiling as though relieved of a strain. "We thought for a time that you might have been used up for good. Here, take this."

He was about to pour something from a flask when he was interrupted by a shout from the bow, and craned his neck to look forward.

"Nothing serious, I guess," he said. "We downed

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

the crowd, thanks to Violette. Here, sis, brace up and don't be foolish! Take the flask and play nurse again until I see what's wanted."

"And Turk?" I asked.

"He's the toughest one of the lot, with all his years. Barked on the skull and cut in the hand—nothing more. I'll be back in a shake. You obey Violette."

He placed the flask on the seat beside me and walked forward. The girl wiped the tears from her eyes with her bare hands and came over to me.

"You are alive again, and I—we thought terrible things for a while," she said, trying to smile as she poured out a dram from the flask. The stimulant lifted me like a strong hand, and the benumbing weakness that had held me began gradually to pass away.

"They have gone?" I asked. I remembered then; all the details of what I had seen rushed to my mind. "And you saved us—me—all of us. Where's Fosse? Diaz? Are they all gone? How long ago was it?"

"You were unconscious for three hours," she answered softly. "Oh! I cannot speak of it! It was all horrible! I don't know what I did until after it was done, but it was you who surprised them before they got fully armed. That is what saved us—Stet will tell you so. No, you saved my life—all of us.



CONSEQUENCES

Don't talk of me—I was unhurt. It is all too horrible, but—thank God—it is all over."

She put her hands to her face again and shuddered, and then I did a daring thing—a thing I would not have more than dreamed of doing had my state been normal. But my very weakness fortified me. I drew one of her hands down and held it, unresisted. Does the blind god ever stop to think of position or policy, blood or bandages, wit or wisdom?

At that moment a boy of ten might have handled me in body, but in spirit I suddenly became a giant. For a minute I was brave.

"Violette," I said, realizing only that I was alone with her and that my passion was past restraint, "you say that I saved your life. Let it be so; I will not argue with you, and am glad if it be true. But I am well-nigh wrecked and have been close to death, therefore, my need is great and makes me a beggar to you.

"I have little fear of the future, but as God is my witness, I would rather have gone outright than have you refuse to pay me for my service to you—as I wish to be paid. Do you understand?"

The question was hardly necessary. The fingers trembled a little in my grasp, but they were not withdrawn. She turned her beautiful eyes to me, her face full of surprised tenderness. And then, most inop-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

portunately, came the voice of Delavan, who brought me back to earth by running aft and shouting as he came:

“We’re afloat! We’re afloat!”

At the cry the girl snatched her hand from mine, her face turned scarlet as she met the eyes of her brother, and, rising hurriedly, she went below. At the same instant I heard several blows struck on the anchor pin and the chain cable roared through the hawse-pipe as the ground tackle plunged to the bottom.

For we were afloat! The earthquake had either shaken us into deep water or the beach had sunk beneath us, for by the lead-line we had five fathoms of brine beneath our keel and we had drifted appreciably nearer the shore.

With my friend to assist me, I walked slowly forward and saw the grisly result of the fight. The dead had been drawn up in a row, and among them lay the steward and the fellow I had shot in the cabin. Of the seven who had attacked us, five had been killed outright and two were wounded, one of whom had but a short time to live.

The three who had stood in the line of fire from the cannon were terribly mangled. Fosse lay, his wide-open eyes bulging as though he had seen something horrible in death.

CONSEQUENCES

"We both lost our weapons when we clinched," said Delavan, pointing to the body of the secretary, "and I simply had to choke him to death; there was nothing else to do. He wouldn't surrender, and I never heard a man curse as he did before I got my final hold on him.

"The whole business is plain enough now—even the torch. I got the story from Stophe, the carpenter, the fellow who dove overboard, you know; we have him forward. It seems that four of the men swam off to us in the dark and just before the first quake. They sneaked up the bob-stay without being heard—"

"Great Glory!" I interrupted, "I believe your sister heard them; she spoke of a splashing."

"It's a wonder—under the circumstances," he said, with a queer smile, "but whether she heard that or something else, there they were; and they got down the galley hatch. That light on the beach was held by Diaz for the purpose of attracting attention from the deck. Diaz is ashore now, and he is alone. Stophe, who cooked up the whole affair, light and all, curses him as a coward. The dodge was successful, anyway, and the fellows got below, where, to their own great astonishment, they found Fosse and the other two free. Fosse had stabbed the steward, who had been guarding them, you know, but how he

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

found the keys to the handcuffs and obtained the knife, I can't imagine. Perhaps you can tell. The knife had Fosse's name on it and the keys were found on the floor."

"It seems plain to me," I said, as the matter cleared itself in my brain. "The steward was probably bought by a promise of a big share of the treasure. He got his just reward. As for the keys: he made my bed and found them where I had hidden them between the mattresses—and forgotten them. When you went on deck and he took your place he tossed them to Fosse. I can hardly pity him. The knife was in my room on the console of the mirror."

"It is the probable solution," said Delavan; "but you made a timely discovery. They were working at the arms-locker for ammunition when your shot came. It broke up their plans, and they had to attack without much form, and when they were only partly prepared.

"But it was a mighty close call for all hands. Turk got the two wounded men; he is not seriously hurt. You have a nasty flesh wound, but I don't think the bone is touched. You lost more blood than I thought any man could stand losing. I am jarred a bit, but unhurt; and wasn't Violette a trump—a level-headed little trump to run to the gun?"

CONSEQUENCES

"Level-headed! Is that all you can say for her?" I interposed.

Delavan laughed aloud for the first time since he had come aboard—a clear laugh, with his head thrown back and his mouth open. It was a sound and a manner that flung time back clear to our old college days. "Yes; I need say no more, you crystalline individual," he replied, "I will leave the rest to you—to tell her. Now, what about Diaz?"

"Nothing about him," I replied, with an access of dignity and an effort to appear as though I had not comprehended his previous remark, though I was conscious of a rise of color. "He has chosen his bed; let him lie in it. He won't starve. Perhaps we can sail to-morrow if there's wind. Better lead me back to the cock-pit—I've had about all I can stand."

But it was more like being carried, for with the iron boatswain on one hand and my giant friend on the other I was fairly lifted aft, and there, on the cushions, I lay the rest of the day while the two weighted the dead and eased them overboard. It was rather uncanny to think we would have their corpses under our keel through the long hours of the night.

But, in reality, I cared little for either corpses or wounds. When one is weak from loss of blood, but otherwise in rugged health, he is capable of delicious

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

languor, and on that day I rested, the joy of hope and expectancy gloriously coloring my half-dreams.

But for hours I did not see Violette alone for so much as a second. She served us with food as though it were a labor of love—as, perhaps, indeed, it was; and we ate on deck, for there was no comfort below, the girl always acting as though unconscious of anything having passed between us. We picnicked, in fact, but as the last of the water was gone we quenched our thirst in light wines though a barrel of fresh water lay in plain sight on the white beach.

After our meal Delavan and Turk turned to and worked with a will, though both were suffering, more or less, from shock and wounds. By four o'clock the blood had been washed from the deck and something like half order brought from the chaos below. The boxes were thrown into the lazarette, the hatch covered, the table freed from the clutch of the piano, and the floor cleared of glass from the broken skylight.

It was close to sunset. Delavan and Turk had just knocked off work, the former joining me and the latter going forward to the wounded men, when the boatswain bawled out that Diaz was on the beach trying to get the long-boat afloat. I got up and Delavan helped me to the bulwark, from where we

CONSEQUENCES

watched the lonely man. For some time he strained without success, and it was plain that to move the heavy boat was beyond the power of the single arm of such a man as the Cuban. At last he desisted and, jumping to the top of the barrel of water that stood end up, he lifted his arms above his head as though to show his helplessness.

"I am going for that fellow," said Delavan suddenly. "If he's a coward—and there is small doubt he is—we need not fear him. What we want is that water, and we must have it. What do you say,"

I made no objection. Turk helped lower away the quarter-boat and they put off, each with a rifle. I watched them go ashore. They talked to Diaz, who gesticulated wildly, then the three got the barrel into the long-boat, and taking it in tow, started back to the schooner.

I returned to my cushion and, as I seated myself, the girl, of whom consciously or subconsciously I was always thinking, came up from below dressed for the evening as though the social custom of the schooner had never been altered.

To me she was superb. Perhaps the leveling rays of the setting sun threw a rosy radiance over her; perhaps it was for another reason that her face looked like a delicate flower as she saw I was alone. I held out my hand to her.

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

"I thought you would never come," I said, questioning her with my eyes.

"I thought— thought Stetson was here," she answered.

"And am I to hunger and thirst forever?" I said. "I have been waiting—waiting—"

"Ah, don't," she answered gently. Then with a quick glance around she bent and laid her lips to mine, and her face was like a pink rose.

And was that the end? No, thank God! It was but the beginning—for the end is not yet. And for me? Well, life began that day—that day of days.

But it was the end of our strenuous period, and I have but little more to tell, and that only, that I may knit up the ravelled ends of my tale.

For two more days we lay without wind, but on the third the murky conditions cleared and the trade-wind piped again. On the fourth day we sailed away from the island which had been both my bane and my blessing, holding a course for Havana, instead of a port in the United States. One of the wounded men died, but the carpenter recovered, and both he and Diaz, who was abject in his humility, helped work the schooner.

The night we dropped anchor in Havana harbor the carpenter disappeared, and we never saw him again. I thought that in the face of what he was

CONSEQUENCES

about to meet he had committed suicide, but later came to the conclusion that he had jumped overboard in the dark and escaped by swimming ashore. Diaz was at once placed in the custody of the authorities.

As for young Fosse, I saw him and talked with him, telling him of the fate of his brother. He was stunned by the news but offered nothing in extenuation for Gabriel. His knife I still have among my trophies, and I have cut another notch in its handle.

The time taken by the return voyage had not come amiss for me. During the long days Delavan carefully examined the books and papers found in the safe, the hiding place of which I had accidentally discovered. My friend told me he had stumbled upon evidence of fraud against me wrought by my late partner, Ravenna, who had been intimate with Basco in a business way, and told me the chances were that I could recover considerable of my lost estates by putting in my claim with other creditors of Basco. I did as he advised and for two years was up to my neck in law, but finally managed to recover some fifteen thousand dollars of the forty thousand I had lost.

Violette's fortune, or, I should say, the fortune of my wife, was found intact, there being plenty of evi-

A PRISONER OF THE SEA

dence to show that the marked bags held the proceeds of the trust fund belonging to her.

And Dave Turk? Ah, old and faithful Dave! He lives on a fairly handsome allowance made to him by Martinez & Co., and he can be seen to this day in a certain sleepy old town on the coast of Maine, still hearty, thriftless, and appreciated best by those who know him best.

Delavan and I finally became agents for the house in New York, with headquarters in Havana, and we have so prospered that to-day I am to be envied in my possession of this world's goods.

But that detail sounds sordid. Money is nothing in the light of my abounding happiness; and that happiness is yet so young, the events that rounded it so real and so recent, that, as I write, my blood bounds with the same spirit as that which held me in the days when I was a prisoner of the sea.

FINIS



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 138 247 2

